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ABSTRACT

This book presents ideas, strategies, and information intended to help teachers provide students with skills to perform effectively on specific writing tests. The first part of the book ("Background/Rationale") encompasses two major topics--the composing process and scoring methods--to give background for ideas and suggestions in other sections. The second part ("Writing Tests") describes major types of writing tests for which students should be prepared, and includes illustrative examples. The third part ("Teaching Strategies") provides a variety of general teaching activities, demonstrating methods of helping students acquire various skills and attitudes important to effective writing in each of the respective situations. Appendixes contain a trait scoring guide, competency test sample, College Board test sample, college application sample, and suggestions for sharing activities. Contains 37 references. (SR)

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How to Prepare Students for Writing Tests

Frederick B. Tuttle, Jr.

A National Education Association Publication

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How to Prepare Students for Writing Tests

Frederick B. Tuttle, Jr.

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Preface

Throughout the 1970s a clamor arose over the apparent decline in the quality of writing by American students. As a result of this outcry, researchers and educators have examined procedures professional writers and students use for their written composition. This research has encouraged instructional changes in the schools, focusing particularly on direct instruction and more assessment of student writing. The emphasis on evaluation has placed greater pressures on students to perform well in writing tests. These writing assessments vary considerably from each other in their specific requirements and even proficient writers may be confused or embarrassed if they are not sufficiently well prepared. Consequently, in addition to helping students become proficient in narrative, expository, and creative writing in general, teachers should also provide them with skills to perform effectively on specific writing tests. The ideas, information, and strategies in this monograph are intended to help teachers with this task.

The monograph is organized into three parts. The first part encompasses two major topics—the composing process and scoring methods—to give background for ideas and suggestions in other sections. While many teachers are certainly familiar with most if not all of these ideas, a review will provide a mutual understanding of concepts and strategies referred to throughout the publication.

The second part describes major types of writing tests for which students should be prepared. The examples used illustrate several types of tests and are not meant to be all-inclusive. If I have omitted a favorite test, I apologize. Several pages are devoted to teacher-constructed tests, for these are by far the most prevalent method of assessing student writing ability.

The third part provides a variety of general teaching activities demonstrating methods of helping students acquire various skills and attitudes important to effective writing in each of the respective situations. First, there is a suggested procedure for using the composing process as an instructional tool. Then there are general activities designed to prepare students for taking writing tests. Following this discussion are several additional relevant writing activities suggested by a variety of educators.

I want to thank the following people who assisted me in preparing this monograph:

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In addition, the members of the Advisory Panel, whose names appear on page 4, provided helpful comments and criticisms.

Part 1

Background/Rationale

As the concern over students' writing ability has increased, so has the use of writing tests to determine this ability. In contrast to the earlier view that writing ability could be assessed through objective testing, research has demonstrated that writing samples are necessary to assess an individual's ability to write effectively (1)*. Even colleges and universities have increased their use of writing proficiency tests. As Rosentene Purnell notes in her survey, "The overwhelming majority (80 percent) of respondents who indicated that they used testing as a meaningful tool for making decisions indicated that they considered an essay (a writing sample) to be an integral and indispensable part of a test of writing proficiency and, not surprisingly, a majority of these used holistic scoring as the primary method of evaluating these essays" (22, p. 408).

The call for writing tests has been dramatically exemplified by the increasing requirement of writing samples as part of basic skills tests in many states. While some writing samples are gathered primarily for general assessment of writing throughout a school system or state, systemwide assessments are also used to judge individual competency. Students who fail to achieve minimum writing standards usually receive remediation and continue taking the writing tests until they pass. In some cases, those who do not achieve minimum competency on these tests may not be granted high school diplomas. The latter procedure seems to be gaining support in many states with basic skills testing programs.

In addition to the state requirements, some students also face other kinds of writing assessments as they elect to take tests for advanced education. These "tests" range from formal, commercial tests such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test Writing Sample, to writing tasks such as essays on college applications.

Tests of writing ability include both untimed, "power" tests in which students select their own topics and have opportunities for writing and rewriting, as well as timed, "impromptu" tests in which students are given specific topics and a limited time to complete the task. To prepare students to perform effectively, teachers should teach the general writing skills required in all major types of writing assessments under both power and impromptu conditions.

One of the more prevalent methods of assessing students' understanding of major academic concepts is the teacher-constructed essay test. Students who are unable to express themselves effectively on essay tests, however, will obviously be unable to demonstrate their understandings of the concepts to the reader. Consequently, since teachers often evaluate students' understanding of concepts through these writing tests, they should also provide appropriate instruction so that the writing itself does not impede students' demonstration of these understandings. In addition to teaching the writing skills necessary for effective response to teacher-constructed writing

*Numbers in parentheses appearing in the text refer to the Bibliography beginning on page 63.

tests, educators also need to know how to prepare good composition tests for in-class assessments. Finally, since major social and educational agencies place a high value on writing test performance it is important that teachers prepare students to perform well on these assessments upon which immediate and future decisions will be based. Such instruction requires an awareness of the general components and instructional implications of the writing process as well as of the various kinds of writing tests, including both commercial and teacher-constructed instruments.

THE WRITING PROCESS

Prior to the current emphasis on the writing process described in the following section, "Power Writing," teachers often assigned and corrected compositions with no intervening instruction. This approach assumed that students would carefully review teacher comments and apply the suggestions or criticisms during their next composing efforts. Both Squire and Applebee in 1966 and Hillocks in 1972 estimated that only about 17 percent of the instructional time was spent on instruction in composition (1). Since then, both the instructional time and emphasis have changed, with more time being spent on teaching students "composing skills such as formulating a thesis, developing and supporting ideas, and organizing the essay's content" (1).

When educators discuss the "writing process," they usually refer to a process of several steps that most professional writers use when writing for publication. These general steps include prewriting, drafting, and revising. According to many educators, this process is "real" writing. For many who are not professional writers, however—including students—this is only one of many writing processes they have to use. While writing this manuscript, for example, I certainly prewrite, draft, and revise. But, when sending memos to others, I do not have time to write multiple drafts; I must "publish" the first draft. Sometimes I have to dictate letters. When I "write" or compose in this way, I do not even see the written work until after it has been "published." Much of the writing most people do involves a variety of processes, depending on the situation and audience.

Lester Faigley and others found that working with a variety of composing processes is important preparation for writing in the "real world" of business: "College trained people are likely to compose alone and with others, sometimes by dictating and sometimes by writing, sometimes by a single draft and at other times through multiple drafts" (10, p. 61). While the writing requirements may change in the future, it seems they may become more diversified rather than diminished through the use of more technology such as word processing programs. The ". . . national interest in written communication is not a passing fad and . . . writing ability will be important for a large percentage of the jobs that college-trained people enter in the near, and not so near future" (10, p. 63).

Throughout their school careers, students also must call upon a variety of writing processes. To be sure, when they have time and opportunity to research, draft, share with others, revise, and rewrite, they should go through these steps. At other times, however, they are called upon to compose their ideas for written publication with time for only one step in the process: writing. Most essay tests and standardized writing tests require such an "impromptu" writing approach. This approach is just

as "real" for students at the time as the formal writing for publication. Many good writers employ appropriate composing processes automatically with little conscious consideration of how they put their thoughts into words. Others, however, need assistance. Even good writers may benefit from an analysis of composing techniques.

Power Writing

"Power writing" refers to those situations in which the writer has the opportunity to follow the composing process of prewriting, drafting, and revising (16). While many educators use other terms or separate some of the stages into subcategories, these three stages are common to all descriptions of the "writing process." In 1978 I described these steps in a previous publication:

> In general, we go through various steps when we compose. First, we have something we want to communicate to someone else, our reaction to some stimulus. . . . [Prewriting] Second, we experiment. We try a tentative composition to see what it looks like. At this point we are writing for our eyes only. . . . [Drafting] Third, we clarify what we have composed. . . . During this stage we edit, deleting some statements, adding others, clarifying many. [Revising] (31, pp. 8–9)

In each of these stages, of course, the writer performs many tasks that contribute to the final product. In the "prewriting" stage the writer begins to focus on the topic to be explored, gathers data, and plays with various composing patterns. In the "drafting" stage the writer translates the thoughts into print for the first time, playing with the ideas as they appear on the page. In the "revising" stage the writer edits, putting the printed text into final form for the intended audience. These stages certainly are not so sequential as this discussion suggests. The "prewriting" activities occur throughout the entire process as the writer continually gathers data, reconsiders the topic, and plays with patterns. Also, the writer may compose several "drafts" before making the final "revision" of the work. Instead of a linear progression through steps, the composing process is more of a spiral with continual interaction among the stages, each building on the refinement of the previous stage.

Richard Gebhardt stresses this view of the writing process as one of reciprocating movement among the various stages in his review of the research:

> Faigley and Witte underscore conclusions of such researchers that "revision cannot be separated from other aspects of composing," since expert writers "move back and forth among the various activities of composing and . . . frequently review what they have written and make changes while in the midst of generating a text." Similarly, Berkenkorter shows that experienced writers "ask themselves the questions that their reader might be expected to ask," and that "in the process of being one's own reader, an expert writer is constantly revising."
>
> We can thus hope that "reviewing" will now be recognized as a pervasive writing activity, rather than a final "stage" in composing. Such a development would mean that [we should abandon] the three-stage, linear model of writing which, Faigley and Witte note, gave rise to the idea that revision is a "tidying-up activity aimed at eliminating surface errors." (11, pp. 295–96)

The Maryland State Department of Education has described the process:

> Each of these stages has its own components, which may occur separately or simultaneously, in sequence or out.
>
> Visually the process might be represented by a figure comprised of three circles: the process is continuous, and its stages overlap. (16, p. 2)

Gebhardt adds a final caution to the use of models simplifying the writing process: The "processes of writing are sufficiently complex, and sufficiently variable from writer to writer, that they cannot be reduced to simple formulas" (11, p. 296). These formulas or models do, however, provide suggestions for approaches to teaching written composition. While the models certainly do not provide adequate descriptions of all composing processes, or even of one approach in detail, they do provide teachers with more accurate structures than those of the draft-correct approach still found in many classrooms.

Impromptu Writing

Often students are required to express their thoughts or demonstrate their understandings within a very limited time frame, usually less than an hour. Consequently, they do not have adequate opportunity for either prewriting or revision. They have to perform all the prewriting tasks within a few minutes, then draft their ideas as quickly as possible. Those who have many ideas on the specific topic are usually left with little or no time for revision or editing. A researcher comparing length of essay test sessions describes a student's frustration with a timed essay test during a follow-up interview:

> One of the better writers reported that she needed time to debate with herself as follows: "If I wrote it this way, what would I think? If I wrote it that way, what would I think? Which is stronger? Which is really the better idea?" This particular student actually reversed her decision to affirm the stated argument and decided to disagree with the statement 50 minutes after the testing period began. She noted that she would not have been able to agree with her own thesis at the end of the 45-minute testing period. Her habit of internal, rhetorical questioning was one of the things that made her a successful writer, but she would have had to ignore her own doubts about this subject in order to produce an essay in the shorter (one hour) session. (2, p. 98)

The importance of teaching students to perform well in impromptu situations is often overlooked with the stress on "power writing" and on "content." Few teachers of disciplines other than English spend class time teaching their students how to write in their content areas. While they often stress vocabulary and punctuation, they seldom discuss major factors in good writing such as organizational patterns and style. These factors ultimately determine the reader's perception of the student's understanding of the material and are therefore vital components of classroom instruction. Even in the English classroom teachers seldom prepare students for impromptu writing. Although instruction in the composing process has proven beneficial (34) for power writing tasks, students need direct instruction in impromptu writing since they must ultimately demonstrate many understandings and abilities in this way.

SCORING

I have included general information about the scoring of writing samples for two reasons. First, while much of their response to students' writing is informal and, hopefully, instructive, periodically teachers must formally evaluate students' skills, using valid scoring procedures. Second, unless teachers are familiar with the ways students' writing samples are evaluated by others, they cannot adequately prepare them to perform well on the task. Finally, formal scoring procedures also provide valuable instructional activities when students apply them to their own writing.

In general, evaluators use one of three methods for scoring written responses: analytical, primary trait, or holistic. The particular method used depends on the purpose of the writing assessment, the time and resources available for scoring, and the training of the readers.

Analytical Scoring

As the name implies, analytical scoring breaks the writing task into component parts and rates these parts according to their importance to the work's overall effectiveness. The final score is the total of the component scores. After training in consistent application of the scale using sample compositions, the readers score the writing samples according to the particular analytical scale. One of the most popular of these scales was developed by Paul Diederich (6). It has been adopted by Educational Testing Service.

The Diederich Scale

1 = Poor 2 = Weak 3 = Average 4 = Good 5 = Excellent

Component	Score Range		Weight		Score	Possible Score
Ideas	1 - 5	X	5	=	_____	(25)
Organization	1 - 5	X	5	=	_____	(25)
Flavor, Diction	1 - 5	X	3	=	_____	(15)
Sentences	1 - 5	X	3	=	_____	(15)
Capitalization	1 - 5	X	1	=	_____	(5)
Punctuation	1 - 5	X	1	=	_____	(5)
Spelling	1 - 5	X	1	=	_____	(5)
Form	1 - 5	X	1	=	_____	(5)
			Total	=	_____	(100)

Diederich describes "*Ideas*," "*Organization*," *and* "*Flavor*" *as follows:*

Ideas

High. The student has given some thought to the topic and writes what he really thinks. He discusses each main point long enough to show clearly what he means. He supports each main point with arguments, examples, or details; he gives the reader some reason for believing it. His points are clearly related to the topic and to the main idea or impression he is trying to convey. No necessary points are overlooked and there is no padding.

Middle. The paper gives the impression that the student does not really believe what he is writing or does not fully understand what it means. He tries to guess what the teacher wants and writes what he thinks will get by. He does not explain his points very clearly or make them come alive to the reader. He writes what he thinks will sound good, not what he believes or knows.

Low. It is either hard to tell what points the student is trying to make or else they are so silly that, if he had only stopped to think, he would have realized that they made no sense. He is only trying to get something down on paper. He does not explain his points; he only asserts them and then goes on to something else, or he repeats them in slightly different words. He does not bother to check his facts, and much of what he writes is obviously untrue. No one believes this sort of writing—not even the student who wrote it.

Organization

High. The paper starts at a good point, has a sense of movement, gets somewhere, and then stops. The paper has an underlying plan that the reader can follow; he is never in doubt as to where he is or where he is going. Sometimes there is a little twist near the end that makes the paper come out in a way that the reader does not expect, but it seems quite logical. Main points are treated at greatest length or with greatest emphasis, others in proportion to their importance.

Middle. The organization of this paper is standard and conventional. There is usually a one-paragraph introduction, three main points each treated in one paragraph, and a conclusion that often seems tacked on or forced. Some trivial points are treated in greater detail than important points, and there is usually some dead wood that might better be cut out.

Low. This paper starts anywhere and never gets anywhere. The main points are not clearly separated from one another, and they come in a random order—as though the student had not given any thought to what he intended to say before he started to write. The paper seems to start in one direction, then another, then another, until the reader is lost.

Flavor

High. The writing sounds like a person, not a committee. The writer seems quite sincere and candid, and he writes about something he knows, often from personal experience. You could not mistake this writing for the writing of anyone else. Although the writer may assume different roles in different papers, he does not put on airs. He is brave enough to reveal himself just as he is.

Middle. The writer usually tries to appear better or wiser than he really is. He tends to write lofty sentiments and broad generalities. He does not put in the little homely details that show that he knows what he is talking about. His writing tries to sound impressive. Sometimes it is impersonal and correct but colorless, without personal feeling or imagination.

Low. The writer reveals himself well enough but without meaning to. His thoughts and feelings are those of an uneducated person who does not realize how bad they sound. His way of expressing himself differs from standard English, but it is not his personal style; it is the way uneducated people talk in his neighborhood. Sometimes the unconscious revelation is so touching that we are tempted to rate it high on flavor, but it deserves a high rating only if the effect is intended. (6, pp. 55–57)

Primary Trait Scoring

This method is a sophisticated version of analytical scoring. Of the three approaches discussed here, primary trait scoring is the most expensive, the most time-consuming, and the most difficult to implement. However, it also produces the best information for curriculum development.

Primary trait scoring typically involves three steps. Initially, a specific writing task, such as writing a business letter, is analyzed for the elements (primary traits) that are absolutely necessary to complete the task successfully. For example, the readers might determine that the primary traits for writing a business letter are (1) to provide essential background, (2) to make a specific request, (3) to use acceptable business letter form (36).

After specifying the primary traits of the particular writing task, the scorers then determine a ranking for each trait using predetermined guidelines. Section 1 of the Appendix contains the guidelines provided for readers of business letter writing samples by the state of Georgia (14, pp. 74–75). I have selected this example for two reasons: (1) most basic competency tests of writing require a business letter and (2) the directions may be used by teachers as an illustration to develop primary trait guides for other writing samples.

After the primary traits have been delineated, the readers must be trained to apply them to the writing samples. The training of those who were involved in determining the primary traits would focus on consistent application of the rankings. The training of those not involved in that stage would include mutual understanding of the primary traits as well as consistent application of the rankings. When scoring a writing sample, the readers are directed to ignore elements not cited as "primary traits."

Holistic Scoring

Readers using this approach assess the quality of the writing sample "as a whole," reading the entire work and scoring it according to its total impact. They rank the compositions on a predetermined scale or range of scores. The most common scales are 1 through 4 (omitting the middle rank) and 1 through 7 (providing a wider range of scores). When applying the scales, the scorers judge the compositions in relation to the others being read. During the training session the scorers continually compare their scores with those of other readers or "experts" who selected the readers until the general interpretations of the quality of the sample compositions are consistent. Short retraining sessions may be provided periodically during the reading of the samples to check on and maintain consistency. During these training sessions, the scorers read samples that reflect the various levels of writing being evaluated.

Usually readers are given general guidelines for scoring the writing samples. The state of Georgia cites the following guidelines to be used on a four-point scale:

Holistic Guidelines

3–4	Addresses the topic Has logical organization of ideas and ease of transition Has well-developed ideas Has only minor mechanical problems that do not interfere with meaning Has effective/sophisticated word choice Contains varied sentence structure
2–3	Does not stray significantly from assigned topic Has discernible organization Gives some attention to idea development May contain some mechanical errors which interfere with meaning Has appropriate, understandable word choice Contains primarily complete sentences
1–2	May ramble or stray from assigned topic May be lacking in organization May lack development of ideas Will contain serious mechanical errors which interfere with meaning Tends toward frequent errors in sentence structure
Zero	Is undecipherable Is meaningless Is clearly unrelated to the topic (14, p. 47)

To score the compositions, the readers first separate the samples into two general piles—high and low with the four-point scale—or three general piles—high, middle, and low with the seven-point scale. Those using the four-point scale then subdivide the two piles into four, one for each rank with four being high. Those using the seven-point scale divide the "high" pile in half, the "middle" pile into thirds, and the

"low" pile in half, giving them seven rankings with 7 being "very high" and 1 being "very low."

As with the other scoring methods, each composition is read by at least two readers. Because of the general nature of the rankings, compositions with contiguous scores are usually accepted (for example, "4" and "5") and compositions with scores that are noncontiguous are reevaluated (for example, "3" and "5"). In the case of noncontiguous scores, a third reader may rank the composition to mediate the disagreement. In most scoring situations the rankings of the readers are totaled for the writing sample, giving a possible high with two readers of "8" on a four-point scale and "14" on a seven-point scale.

Edward White provides six general suggestions for holistic scoring that, when carefully observed, will yield high reliability:

> 1. *Controlled Essay Reading.* All those scoring the papers are brought together to read at the same time and place, with the same working hours and breaks. . . .
>
> 2. *Scoring Criteria Guide* (called by ETS a "rubric"). This direct statement of descriptors for papers at different points on the scoring scale is developed by those leading the controlled essay reading before the readers gather. . . .
>
> 3. *Sample Papers* (sometimes called "anchor papers"). While the scoring guide is an abstract description of points on the scale, these papers are examples of these points. . . . Not until all readers are in close agreement on the scores of these sample papers, and on what characteristics have determined the score, can a reliable reading begin. . . .
>
> 4. *Checks on the Reading in Progress.* Readers are customarily grouped by tables seating five or six (never more than seven) with an experienced Table Leader responsible for consistent scoring at the table. The Table Leader does not originate scores; his or her task is to circulate from reader to reader at the table, checking scores so that all readers will continue scoring at the same level. . . .
>
> 5. *Multiple Independent Scoring.* Two readers from two different tables in the reading score each essay; the first score is concealed so that the second scoring is independent. The two scores should be added together to create a full-range distribution of [scores]. A one-point difference is allowable; two-point differences are read a third time in order to resolve the discrepancy. An excellent reading on a six-point scale will have a 5 percent or fewer discrepant scores; an average reading will have 7–10 percent of its scores more than one point apart. Unless there is more than one reading for each essay, there is no way to evaluate the reliability of the reading or of individual readers.
>
> 6. *Evaluation and Record Keeping.* Since a reliable reading requires reliable readers, a continuing program will keep records of the scoring done by readers, with particular attention to their consistency in observing the established criteria. The most reliable scorers form the cadre around which future essay readings may be built. (37, pp. 404–5)

Norman Najimy has adapted a comparison of analytical and holistic scoring from the Educational Testing Service:

Analytical and Holistic Scoring: Advantages, Disadvantages

Analytical Scoring

- Precise criteria make decisions concerning correctness relatively easy.
- Identification of particular components (or skills) that an individual needs to work on is facilitated.
- Analysis of components of a composition is time-consuming.
- Using a standard set of criteria for evaluating all papers may be overrestrictive.
- Scoring is done by one evaluator, so no opportunity is offered to scorers to gain new insights through prescoring sessions [although prescoring and multiple readers may be used with analytical approaches].
- Emphasis is often placed on flaws rather than strengths of a paper.

Holistic Scoring

- Criteria treat writing as a whole product rather than as a set of separate components. The components are therefore considered simultaneously.
- Having more than one evaluator score each paper leads to a fairly accurate assessment of a student's overall writing ability.
- During the prescoring sessions, evaluators have opportunities to gain new insights into writing through discussion of strengths and weaknesses of sample papers, and through sharing of ideas about writing. These insights often carry over into classroom teaching practices.
- Emphasis is usually placed on strengths of a paper.
- Many papers may be read and scored in relatively short time. (20, pp. 10–11)

Part 2

Writing Tests

This part discusses some of the writing tests facing students. They will be separated into three categories: teacher-constructed writing tests, externally developed writing tests, and informal writing tests. In the first group, essay test construction is the primary focus. The second group includes writing tasks required by many states to assess student competency in writing, and writing tasks developed by test publishers such as Educational Testing Service. The third group includes writing tasks often requested as part of an application to business or institutions of higher education.

TEACHER-CONSTRUCTED WRITING TESTS

Essay tests are particularly valuable when students are to synthesize and/or evaluate information and present their ideas in their own way. Indeed, many teachers believe the essay test is the only one that enables students to work at the highest levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (synthesis and evaluation). Appropriate construction of good essay tests requires consideration of several factors, however, including the limitations of essay tests, the construction of the essay test, and scoring procedures.

Limitations

The essay test has several limitations, many of which may be overcome if the teacher is aware of them and takes appropriate action to avoid the problems. Hopkins and Stanley have cited six of these limitations.

> *Reader Unreliability.* A major problem with essay examinations is the lack of consistency in judgments among competent raters, that is, the lack of scorer or reader reliability. . . . It is not difficult to obtain high scorer reliability if essay questions are narrowly focused and carefully structured.
>
> *The Halo Effect.* The halo effect is the tendency, in evaluating one characteristic of a person, to be influenced by another characteristic or by one's general impression of that person. . . . [For example, if student] Dogood is a well-behaved student who loves [the] teacher and tries very hard to please, these characteristics can influence the teacher's judgment of the quality of [Dogood's] essay test. When essay tests are not read anonymously, the halo effect can seriously contaminate the results.
>
> *Item-to-Item Carryover Effects.* A common contaminant in scoring essay tests is the item-to-item carryover effect. The rater acquires an impression of the student's knowledge on the initial item that "colors" his or her judgment of the second item. . . . Obviously, the response to an essay question should be evaluated on its own merits and should not be influenced by preceding questions on the test.

Test-to-Test Carryover Effects. It has been observed that the grade assigned to a paper tends to be greatly influenced by the grade given to the immediately preceding paper. [An "average" paper may be rated "high" if it is read after a "low" paper and "low" if it is read after a "high" paper.]

Order Effects. The order in which a paper appears also affects scores. . . . Papers that [are] read earlier tend to receive higher grades than those read nearer the end of the sequence. Perhaps readers become weary, and in this physical and mental condition nothing looks quite as good as it otherwise might.

Language Mechanics Effects. Investigators have found that teachers [are] unable to rate essay responses . . . on content alone, independent of errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar. . . . [Researchers have] also found that handwriting quality [is] related to the scores awarded to essays. . . . Several investigators . . . have found that the length of an essay response has a substantial relationship . . . to the rating assigned. . . . It seems that there is considerable support for the common notion among test-wise students that instructors often assign marks on the basis of the "weight" of student products. (13, pp. 206–8)

Construction

It is important to know when to use an essay test. Sometimes teachers use the essay format when an objective test would yield better results more efficiently. In general, questions designed to elicit responses at the knowledge level of Bloom's Taxonomy should be part of an objective test. Essay tests are most appropriately used when they ask students to describe, contrast, compare, explain, discuss, develop, summarize, or evaluate (13, p. 214).

Topic

The way in which the topic of the writing task is stated often dictates the response. Consequently, the teacher should define the parameters of responses for the student. Sometimes teachers believe they are asking simple, uncomplicated questions when in reality the questions are nebulous, leaving too much to the student. Open-ended topics such as "Discuss essay tests" are ambiguous and lead to a variety of responses, many of which may not contain the desired information. This ambiguity is the single most important contributor to unreliability. "Discuss essay tests with respect to the six limitations cited by Hopkins and Stanley" defines the task while allowing the student latitude in organization and expression (21, p. 82).

According to some researchers, the importance of the topic may be overstated. While teachers often assume the wording of a topic for a writing sample has an effect on the final product submitted by students, several research studies have failed to support this belief. However, many of the results upon which the researchers base their conclusions may depend more on the research method than on the actual influence of the topic itself since several studies used "instruments and methods that are effective and appropriate" for teaching writing but "may be utterly wrong" for conducting research (12, p. 389). Holistic scoring, for example, is an excellent vehicle

for assessing writing skills but does not provide sufficiently fine distinctions to draw conclusions about the effects of components of a writing situation (such as the topic) on the final product. Consequently, I believe that in spite of some of the research, a great deal of care should be taken in framing the topic to which students will respond on the writing test. As Hoetker suggests, "We are learning that topic variables are both complex and important and that they must be investigated. Until those investigations are carried out, we should get in the habit of looking very carefully at proffered topics" (12, p. 389).

In their description of a model for designing topics for writing samples Leo Ruth and Sandra Murphy conclude,

> Thus, to paraphrase Bronowski, we can say that the text of a writing topic lives in three "moments of vision": the first "moment" occurs when it is created by the test-maker; the second, when it is read by the student writer; and the third, when it is read by the teacher-rater or judge. The more we can make all three visions congruent, the more we will improve the stability of the measure we use in assessment. (26, p. 421)

To make these visions of the essay question more congruent, it is important that all those involved have similar understandings of the directions in the essay question as well as of the parameters of the desired response. Not only should there be agreement on the definitions of these terms between teacher and students but also among teachers themselves. Since most teachers use these terms to assess student knowledge and ability, they should be sure they are requiring the same tasks of students for the same directions. Several of the more common essay terms and some working definitions follow.

> *Evaluate.* Make a judgment about a topic using some criteria as a basis; give the good and bad points; appraise; give an opinion; give advantages and disadvantages. Evaluate Hamlet's reaction to his father's ghost on the basis of the belief in ghosts in Hamlet's time.
>
> *Contrast.* Bring out the points of difference. Contrast Hamlet's and Macbeth's respective actions toward their kings.
>
> *Compare.* Bring out the points of similarity *and* difference. Compare the character development of Ophelia and Lady Macbeth.
>
> *Explain.* Make clear; interpret; offer reasons for. Explain Hamlet's failure to kill the king immediately.
>
> *Describe.* Give an account of; tell about. Describe the setting of the first scene, Act 1 of *Hamlet*.
>
> *Discuss.* Consider from various points of view; present the different sides; compare and contrast points of view. Discuss reasons for Hamlet's delay in confronting Claudius.
>
> *Justify.* Give evidence in support of; show good reason for; support as valid. Justify Hamlet's decision not to kill Claudius at prayer.
>
> *Interpret.* Clarify the meaning of; translate. Interpret the line ". . . for none of woman born shall harm Macbeth" in relation to Macduff's birth.

Summarize. Give the main points briefly; provide major details while giving the main ideas. Summarize the plot of *Macbeth*.

Scoring

Part 1 discussed the three major scoring methods: analytical, primary trait, and holistic. The purpose of the writing test determines the particular method to be used. The analytical and primary trait methods provide more diagnostic information than the holistic by highlighting specific elements of the composition to be assessed. Care must be taken, however, that the weightings of the various elements are appropriate. For example, the Diederich Scale previously cited (6) emphasizes quality and organization (50%), then style and wording (30%), and finally mechanics (20%). The analytical approach focuses both teacher and student attention on those composition elements of the writing sample weighted most heavily since they will affect the final assessment most directly.

Holistic scoring, on the other hand, enables teachers to respond more effectively to the composition as a whole. Edward White fervently stresses the importance of viewing a writing sample as a single entity:

> Holisticism is the form that humanism takes when confronted with analytic reductionism. Holisticism says that the human spirit and its most significant form of expression (writing) must be seen and understood not in parts, but as a whole, face to face as it were, almost sacramentally. Even the meanest bit of halting process, even the most downtrodden of our fellow creatures, deserves to be taken as a living and vital unit of meaning, as an artistic and human whole, not merely as a collection of scraps and parts. (37, p. 409)

If both content and writing ability are to be assessed analytically, the essential elements of the content answer should also be cited and weighted. To arrive at the essential elements of the content response, teachers might write an "ideal" answer before administering the test. This accomplishes several ends. First, as teachers write the response to the question, they have to interpret the question from the writer's point of view, the "second vision." Second, they are able to judge the time required to provide an adequate response to the question. Finally, they are able to consider the essential elements of the "ideal" response as they frame and "correct" their own response. On the basis of their effort to answer the essay question, teachers can reword the topic to help the student focus specifically on the "essential elements" and not misinterpret the topic and respond in a completely different manner (21, pp. 88–89).

Suggestions

To summarize this section I have selected suggestions for constructing and scoring essay tests from several sources (13, 15, 21). Although most are self-explanatory, I have provided brief explanations where necessary. While some of the suggestions relate primarily to essay tests designed to assess writing programs and would be unrealistic for most writing tests, many of them should be considered for all major tests of writing ability.

1. Use the essay question for purposes that it best serves (for example, organization, self-expression, analysis, evaluation) and not for purposes that may be handled more effectively with objective tests (for example, recall of facts).
2. Prepare students to take the essay test. This preparation should include instruction in the essential elements or criteria upon which their writing will be evaluated, effective use of time, and interpretation of topics.
3. Limit and define topics or questions so that each will have unequivocal meaning and direction for the writers.
4. Use many brief essays rather than one long essay to measure achievement. This permits a wider sampling of content and provides for more reliable scoring.
5. Determine in advance how each topic will be evaluated, including essential elements, criteria, and weighting.
6. Score one topic through all of the writing samples before scoring subsequent questions.
7. Score the topics without knowledge of students' names.
8. Use two or more readers if possible.
9. Evaluate the writing samples only on the criteria stated, not on external factors.
10. Write your own answers to the topic(s) before giving the essay test to students and make appropriate modifications to the topic, time frame, and scoring criteria.
11. When designing "power" writing tests, consider the overall conditions of the test situation and provide opportunities for students to write under conditions similar to those they encounter outside the classroom. These include (1) a choice of subjects in advance so that they will have an opportunity to reflect on the topic and to gather necessary information; (2) an opportunity to write a first draft of their ideas and then a revised, edited draft; and (3) use of resources such as dictionaries and thesauri during the test.
12. In all situations, be sure that students have knowledge of the evaluation process, the criteria by which the writing sample will be evaluated, and the intended audience. An effective way to do this is to write your own response to a question and have students evaluate it using the established criteria. Not only does this help students with the writing and scoring, but it is also a good way to review important content.

EXTERNALLY DEVELOPED WRITING TESTS

With the concern over students' writing ability has come an increasing use of writing tests to determine this ability. Many states now require writing samples as part of basic skills tests. While some of these requirements are primarily for the general assessment of writing throughout the school system or state, many are also used to assess individual competency. Students who fail to achieve minimum writing

standards usually have to continue taking the tests or may, in some cases, not be granted high school diplomas. The latter requirement seems to be gaining support in many states with basic skills testing. (Section 2 of the Appendix contains a sample competency test writing question and an analysis of student responses.)

In addition to state assessments, some students also face other kinds of writing tasks as they elect to take tests for advanced education. For example, many students take the Scholastic Aptitude Tests for college admission. These tests often include both multiple-choice items and essay questions to determine writing ability. Usually the publisher's guidelines provide teachers with descriptions of the tests and the scoring procedures. These should be examined with students so that they understand how their works will be read. (Section 3 of the Appendix contains a sample College Board essay question and an analysis of student responses.) Claire Greene uses the following strategies to prepare her students for these tests. She acknowledges that the "methods are not particularly unique, but they are effective."

> After giving students a sample topic, I invite them to volunteer their responses to the topic verbally. Then I explain the scoring method (e.g., 1–4 range, two readers) and discuss the evaluation criteria (content, organization, style, mechanics). After this step students examine three or four sample answers which range from 1–4. Students then evaluate and discuss a group of answers not labeled or ordered. Finally, students write their responses to the topic and swap papers to evaluate each other's writing using the criteria previously discussed.

INFORMAL WRITING TESTS

Increasingly, applicants to institutions of higher education and also for business positions are being required to submit samples of their writing. Although the following discussion focuses on college admissions, the approaches may also be used effectively with business applications. While the essay on college admissions forms is not the primary criterion for entrance, it does influence the admissions personnel. In general, most readers of college admissions essays look for personal growth and ability to resolve internal conflicts when making decisions. This is especially true of topics requesting personal experiences and significant influences on one's life. Since these essays are written outside of a test situation, technical excellence is assumed. Consequently, the content and, particularly, the tone of the essay become very important. The latter elements should receive even more attention with these writing samples than with the formal samples because the readers of the informal tests use extremely subjective criteria, usually unstated.

During a conference at Boston College for high school guidance counselors and college admissions personnel, the participants engaged in an activity that would also be appropriate to help student writers become aware of the subjective criteria used by readers of college admissions essays. Each participant was given four admissions essays to read and rank. After the initial ranking participants formed small groups to arrive at a consensus of rankings. Finally, the whole group compared the various small-group rankings, discussing the reasons for considering one essay better than another. As they ranked and discussed reasons for the rankings, the participants became aware of the subjective nature of the criteria affecting the reader's perception

of the quality of the essay. Factors such as specific examples, resolution of internal conflicts, sincerity of tone, and personal growth emerged as important.

Putting this into perspective with the classroom activity to prepare students to write these informal essays, teachers might initiate discussion of the criteria and the importance of the admissions essay by having students follow the same procedure as the guidance counselors. Then, a general topic similar to the one that follows could be assigned, beginning with a prewriting discussion of ideas.

> It is our purpose to get to know you as well as possible through this application. With this in mind, please describe in detail some special interest, experience, or achievement, or anything else you would like us to know about you. Essays on a personal, local, or national issue that is of particular concern to you are also welcome.

The discussion stage is important for these essays. Norma O'Brien, a guidance counselor at Needham High School, has found that many students do not believe they have had any "significant experience" worth relating. If they discuss ideas before trying to write about them, however, students invariably find they have a great deal to say. After discussing and sharing their ideas, students write their first drafts and then share them with each other, applying some of the criteria previously delineated. Finally, they write and edit their final drafts.

Ed Fitzgerald works extensively with his high school seniors to prepare them to write essays on college application forms. He emphasizes drafting, discussion, and rewriting to such an extent that some students write as many as 16 drafts before they are satisfied with the results. Most, however, write five or six drafts. (For an illustration of the value of drafting and rewriting, see Section 4 of the Appendix.)

Part 3

Teaching Strategies

This part presents a variety of strategies teachers have used to provide students with the skills necessary to perform well on the kinds of writing tests discussed earlier. First, however, some thoughts on general teaching strategies and the "Instructional Composing Process." While students may not always use a draft-rewrite approach on writing tests, many teachers have found that a composing process approach to composition instruction helps prepare them for many types of writing, including impromptu writing tests.

INSTRUCTIONAL COMPOSING PROCESS

Most educators view the general writing process as prewriting, drafting, and revision. To highlight the creative or discovery aspect of writing, Donald Murray has called these stages "prevision," "vision," and "revision" (19). In 1978 in an effort to build upon the composing concepts of educators such as Murray, Charles Cooper, Lee O'Dell, and James Moffett, I designed the "Instructional Writing Process" format for teachers. This design stresses the teaching of written composition in relation to the composing of written composition. It is subdivided into the following components: stimulus, reaction to stimulus, rough draft, skills instruction, sharing, revision, and submission. The use of this process has been effective in both research (35, 7) and curriculum development (4).

Stimulus

A stimulus is any experience to which students may react in writing—an assigned topic, a film or picture, a dramatization, a literary passage or work, a feeling, a test question—anything that promotes a reaction. When teaching students to respond to test situations, teachers should use stimuli that are similar to those to be used on the test. In most instances, these will be written topics requiring certain writing skills and organizational patterns. Such consideration is important because often the false assumption is made that students will react automatically in the appropriate manner to a given stimulus. Indeed, many educators have found that students react in a variety of ways to a given stimulus. Consequently, if the evaluators are looking for specific responses, students must be prepared to interpret the stimulus correctly in order to respond in the most advantageous way.

To frame appropriate responses to topics, students should learn how to analyze test questions quickly before writing. The question that follows was the essay topic for a College Board Test in 1982. (See Section 3 of the Appendix for analyses of student responses to this question.)

> "People seldom stand up for what they truly believe; instead they merely go along with the popular view."

Assignment: Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Write an essay in which you support your opinion with specific examples from history, contemporary affairs, literature, or personal observation.

In general, when students approach this topic, first they select a point of view (agreement or disagreement) and brainstorm supporting examples for their stand. Then they should group the examples into categories—history, contemporary affairs, literature, or personal observation—and, finally, organize them into paragraphs.

A series of exercises in which students practice these tasks for a variety of kinds of questions will help prepare them for the actual test situation. Indeed, if they use the first few minutes of the test period to attack the question immediately with a practiced, automatic approach, they will avoid the tendency to "freeze" when presented with the topic. In addition, by having the answer roughly outlined before writing, they will save time later.

Reaction to Stimulus

James Moffett has stressed the importance of interaction among students (18). Many teachers seldom provide students with opportunities to interact between the presentation of a stimulus and the written response, however. The "reaction" stage serves three major purposes, each important to the learning/writing process. First, it gives students an opportunity to reflect on and verbalize their thoughts. While good writers are often able to verbalize their ideas internally while drafting, many others need to state their thoughts aloud. This helps them clarify their thinking before putting pen to paper. Sometimes it is helpful to have students "free write," jotting down any ideas on the stimulus as quickly as possible, even before discussion. This may be especially important in a test situation.

Second, interacting enables students to hear other views on the topic. The sharing of ideas is not a form of "cheating" but rather another way of gathering information and clarifying thinking about the stimulus. Stating a thesis, hearing alternative ideas, and refining one's original ideas on the basis of new information are important components in the learning process often denied students.

Third, the "reaction" stage gives students time for reflection, time for ideas to take form before being committed to paper for final presentation to the audience. While this opportunity will probably not be available in most test situations, it is an important aspect of the learning process.

Rough Draft

After exploring reactions to the stimulus, students should be ready to write a rough draft, with the emphasis on "rough." To encourage experimentation and provide opportunity for exploration and discovery at this time, the rough draft should emphasize ideas and expression rather than usage and mechanics. Although application of correct usage and mechanical skills is certainly important for effective written communication, this editing process should be reserved for the last stage. If stressed too early, overemphasis on editing will inhibit the expression of ideas.

Skills Instruction

Obviously, this is a highly artificial stage in the writing process but an important one in an instructional program. The more closely instruction in skills is related to

implementation of those skills, the greater the learner's acquisition of the skills. Isolated drills in writing skills are often unproductive because students are unable to make the transition from the drill to the writing itself. Embedding skill instruction in the writing process can demonstrate this relationship more effectively. In addition, teachers can provide more content information while teaching writing skills. For example, if introductory paragraphs are a concern while teaching critical analysis of *Hamlet*, sample criticisms can be used to illustrate good introductions. After students have worked with the skill, they can then apply it immediately in their drafts.

Sharing

Although usually not allowed during a test situation, sharing of ideas is an important step in the learning process. This stage provides students with the opportunity for direct discussion of the effectiveness of their works before submitting them for final evaluation. Few writers submit their material for publication without some preliminary discussion. Again, through sharing ideas and examining the effectiveness of the communication, students learn more about the content or stimulus as well as the quality of their own efforts. Sharing may be conducted in a variety of ways. Some teachers have students read their works aloud to partners while others distribute worksheets as guidelines for peer reading. Still others work directly with students individually. I believe the last approach is the least effective and most inefficient. First, teachers should be helping students become independent writers, using their own resources for feedback. Second, while teachers can provide direct feedback to only a few students using the teacher-student approach, all students can obtain direct feedback using the student-student approach. Finally, while students may not be as knowledgeable about writing as teachers, the sharing sessions become additional learning experiences for them, increasing their abilities both as writers and as readers. The two approaches, however, are not mutually exclusive. While most of the class is using a student-student sharing procedure, the teacher may work with individuals or small groups. (See Section 5 of the Appendix for some suggestions for the sharing stage.)

Revision

After making various changes in the composition based on the skills instruction and after discussing the effectiveness of the work with others, students should be ready to make final revisions. In many cases, they have made considerable changes in the composition throughout the process, with insertions, deletions, arrows, and new ideas and expressions added to the original work. Now, however, they should refine the organization, the expression, and finally, the mechanics and usage. At the end of the revision stage, the writer edits the work carefully for submission.

Submission

Usually the submission of the final composition is taken for granted. Students should realize that once they submit their work, however, they will not be able to modify or correct it. Too often teachers accept a final draft, correct it for students, and then return it for further revision. As a result of this teacher effort, too many students expect the paper to be returned for correction, with all the trouble spots highlighted—which means that they need not put forth quality effort until later. A

paper that requires additional work has not yet reached the "submission" stage and should be revised accordingly. Students should realize that when they finally submit their work to the intended audience, it will have to stand on its own merit without any explanation of what the writer "meant to say" or any excuses for omissions.

I have found the "Instructional Composing Process" approach very effective, especially with the writing of creative works and reports. As students begin to internalize some of the stages, however, they may require less direct, teacher-initiated structure, depending on the individual. I suggest teachers use a direct approach like this initially to provide an instructional framework and then move to more impromptu situations to prepare students more realistically for the actual writing test.

GENERAL ACTIVITIES

Scoring

Awareness of the audience is a major component of all effective writing. The audience for tests of writing ability is made up of readers who have been asked to rate the effectiveness of the writing sample according to specified criteria (see Part 1). Consideration of this audience means consideration of the evaluation criteria since these criteria form the basis for the reaction to the writing sample. The exercises given here help students become familiar with the various evaluative criteria often used to assess the quality of the writing sample. These activities acquaint students with the general development and use of holistic and analytical rating scales. To prepare students for specific writing tests, teachers should try to use the same scales used by the writing sample readers.

Analytical Rating

To initiate discussion of analytical rating scales, have students read sample compositions and assign a grade. Then have them list the reasons for assigning that grade. After all have done this individually, discuss the various reasons for the grades with the full class, putting their responses on the board. Group the responses according to type (for example, mechanics, style, word choice, organization, accuracy of response to question). Discuss each category, appropriately modifying the definitions and components. Then discuss the relative importance of each category and how that importance could be reflected in the final rating of the writing sample. Compare students' weighted analytical form with Diederich's scale (p. 10), discussing both similarities and differences. Finally, have students rate the sample compositions again, this time using Diederich's form.

Holistic Rating

Currently most writing tests are evaluated holistically. The following suggestions by Del Earisman help students use this rating on sample compositions. Not only does Earisman's approach familiarize students with the holistic rating method, but it also helps them focus attention on what constitutes quality writing. Through this approach students can derive the important elements of good writing themselves under the direction of the teacher rather than merely being told what to do.

Holistic Reading in the Composition Class

Del Earisman, Upsala College (New Jersey)

Holistic reading for the evaluation of student writing seems, on first consideration, too simple—almost too gimmicky—to be worth much. However, my experience as a reader for the essay portion of the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test assured me that holistic reading not only ensured reliable scoring of student writing, but is also a valuable way to take into account aspects of writing that too often go unnoticed in the ordinary stop-and-go method of grading papers analytically. Such aspects include syntactic maturity, logicality, richness and appropriateness of illustration, thoughtfulness, and "flavor."

In my classes, I follow the same "morning" procedures used by Educational Testing Service for the readers of the New Jersey basic skills essay. The first step is crucial. One must obtain a set of papers that have already been holistically scored by qualified readers to use as samples. I now use the sample papers available in a booklet entitled *Scoring the Essays for the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test*, distributed by the New Jersey Basic Skills Council. The booklet contains 14 sample papers written by students entering New Jersey colleges, two each for the seven possible scores. (Final scores are arrived at by adding the scores of two readers. Since individual readers' scores range from one to four, a top score would be eight, for a paper that clearly deserved a four grade from both readers. A somewhat weaker paper would likely get a seven, and so on down the line, to those papers that both readers considered to deserve only a one, which would get a final score of two.)

However, a set of samples could easily be developed within an institution, providing that the scoring was done as a carefully-designed staff project. In any case, it is important that anonymity of the writers be preserved. It is also useful for the students to see handwritten papers, because handwriting is a factor, although a minor one, in holistic scoring. The papers then must be xeroxed for distribution to the students. I use the same xeroxed copies over and over again, to reduce costs.

Before handing my students an initial packet of six "range-finders" to consider, I explain the system, stressing the following:

1. Papers should be read supportively. The aim is to reward writers for what they have accomplished, rather than to search for errors to penalize. Readers are to keep in mind the conditions under which the papers were written. In the case of the New Jersey test, there was a 20-minute limit and there was the pressure that is inherent in any standardized test.
2. Papers are to be read through to the end, quickly but intently. Readers are not to mark anything on the papers, and they are not to re-read papers in search for error.
3. Readers must use a four-point scale for grading. That scale obviously omits a middle term, so that each paper will be initially ranked as above or below average. Papers that are clearly superior, then, should be given a four. Papers with almost no virtues should get a one. With a sufficient quantity of papers, there are likely to be about twice as many two's and three's as one's and four's.
4. The packet of six papers they will receive will contain one paper already judged to fall in each of the four categories, plus two others.

I then hand my students a copy of the topic on which the papers had been written, pointing out that there were a number of different aspects of that topic to which the writers might have responded. Finally, I give each student the six papers, and allow them about 15 minutes to read and score the papers.

After the papers are scored, I ask the class to indicate by a show of hands

the scores they have given, and I write those scores on a chart drawn on the blackboard. After all the scores have been posted, I tell the class the scores that experienced readers had given each paper, and only then do we discuss the reasoning behind the scores. Discussion at this point is always vigorous, because once the students have publicly committed themselves to an evaluation, they are fully engaged in the process. An additional reason for the vigor of the discussion is probably the confidence that the students have gained as a result of perceiving that their evaluation is surprisingly close to that of seasoned readers and teachers. The initial discussion inevitably elicits two important points: there is a great deal more to writing quality than freedom from error, and it is unfair to grade papers on the basis of the reader's agreement with the ideas expressed.

Whatever time remains in the period is used to score and comment on more papers, handed out one or two at a time. With sufficient papers on hand, I can usually select additional papers that meet the needs of any given class. If, for example, a class seems to place too much stress on mechanical correctness, I will hand them for consideration an error-free but relatively empty paper that deserves only a two.

For a homework assignment, I ask my students to work in groups writing brief descriptions of a four, a three, a two, and a one paper, returning those descriptions to me on rexograph masters, so that the class as a whole can discuss the descriptions. After discussion, they vote on the best description for each category. I then reproduce a set of the best descriptions and return the composite to the class as the criteria on which their own papers will be evaluated. Here is one such composite set of descriptions, produced by a low-average freshman composition class. Because the descriptions represent something like committee notes from four different committees, the form of the descriptions is not uniform, and of course, some details are somewhat impressionistic ("awful sentence structure").

> *Four Paper:* Extremely informative; stays directly with the point; supports ideas; accurate; well organized; relatively error-free; factual with supporting statements; relatively self-explanatory; stimulates the mind of the reader; good structure of writing.
>
> *Three Paper:* A three paper might be a little vague and lack some detail. It may have a few careless mistakes, but it can still interest the reader. It may not be as well organized as a four-point paper, but it is a well-written one.
>
> *Two Paper:* Two papers are below average because of bad explanation of thought. They have unclear meaning. There are mechanical errors such as spelling and punctuation which are hard to overlook. A two paper doesn't have many examples to support the ideas in the paper.
>
> *One Paper:* A one paper is poorly written, has no organization, shows lack of thought and creativity. It is very uninformative with awful sentence structure. There is no pre-planned format and no conclusion. There are run-on sentences and fragments as well as other grammatical errors.

I use this exercise at the very beginning of every semester, and then as a basis for subsequent work. The descriptions, for example, can be referred to for explanations of my own grades, for which I continue to use a four-point scale. Then, two or three times during the term, I will subject the papers of a whole class to their own holistic evaluation, always concluding with my own grade, which is at times higher than the students'. Although the students enjoy the exercise, I am somewhat sparing with it, first because some weaker students may suffer a degree of humiliation by having their papers publicly given low grades, and I prefer to keep occasions of humiliation to a minimum, and second, because for most of the term, the class is concentrating on one or another

aspects of the production of writing; holistic grading, therefore, would be inappropriate. If, for example, my class is working on giving a causal analysis, I want to reward students only for their success in relating causes and effects effectively.

Holistic reading has provided three clear benefits to my writing classes. It allows my students to feel that we are all participating in a scoring system that is uniform and reliable. They are not, that is, subject to the whims and hangups of an individual instructor. Then too, it expands the categories of evaluation far beyond the achievement of mechanical correctness that most of them believe is the goal of writing instruction. Those categories include most importantly such qualities of thought as appropriateness of exemplification, reasonableness of assertion, accuracy of logical relations, relevance of arguments and data, and consistency of reasoning. They also learn—and this is important for all college work—that the *quality* of thought can be judged separately from the *correctness* of thought. That is, we must be able to judge fairly the quality of thinking in a paper without regard to our agreement or disagreement with the specific ideas expressed. And, finally, my students have attainable standards to work towards. They justly feel that if they themselves can identify the elements of an excellent paper, then they have a realistic hope of writing one themselves, as indeed, many do before the end of the term. (8)

Letter Writing

Most tests of basic skills or competency require students to write friendly letters, business letters, or both. The exercises that follow illustrate two approaches to skills instruction. The first uses other models for analysis, while the second focuses directly on the content of the students' work.

Friendly Letter

The Maryland State Department of Education describes the friendly letter format.

> The following five components should be included in a friendly letter:
>
> a. Heading—only date and/or address should be considered for testing
> b. Salutation
> c. Body—should be in paragraph form as a minimum
> d. Closing
> e. Signature
>
> These elements should be found in the order as listed above. However, due to many acceptable letter styles, we cannot specify a particular one. Thus, we should not be concerned with *one* form of indentation, spatial position on page, and alignment. (16, p. 38)

Stimulus. Give students the following topic:

> Suppose your teacher has asked you to tell about the first time you were allowed to do something on your own. This may have happened recently or long ago. Write a letter telling your teacher what happened when you did something on your own for the first time. (16a)

Discussion. Before students begin writing a rough draft, have them discuss what they might include in the letter. Since the purpose of this discussion is to show an approach to gathering ideas about a topic like this, lead the discussion following a

logical progression by asking questions such as—"What were you allowed to do on your own for the first time?" "Why was it important to you?" "How did you react to it?" "What was the outcome?" Ask students to fill in details for each question. Write their responses in abbreviated form on the chalkboard.

Rough Draft. Have students write a rough draft of a friendly letter on the topic. Remind them to pay particular attention to the development and organization of ideas. Also, remind them to use the correct letter form.

Skills Instruction. Using samples of letters from Section 2 of the Appendix, have students practice assessing friendly letters holistically. Divide the class into groups of three and give each group a packet of sample friendly letters. Then have each group rank the letters 1 to 4, writing the reasons for assigning the ratings. Discuss the ratings and the reasons as a full class. Finally, have students review their own letters, making appropriate changes based on their group discussions.

Sharing/Revision. Have students work in pairs to review each other's compositions using the discussion questions that follow as a guide. After the compositions have been reviewed and discussed, have students revise them, taking into account the comments and new information.

1. Did the writer use the correct letter form?
2. Did the writer provide sufficient details in the letter so that you could understand what happened?
3. Did the writer organize the events so that you could repeat what happened?

Submission. Have students proofread their compositions using the proofreading checklist that follows and submit their compositions for formal response.

1. _____ I spelled the words correctly.
2. _____ I used the correct friendly letter format.
3. _____ My subjects and verbs agree.
4. _____ I have no sentence fragments or run-on sentences.

After students submit their letters, rate them holistically using ideas from the class discussion to assign ratings.

Business Letter

The Maryland State Department of Education describes the business letter format:

a. Heading—must include date and complete address
b. Inside address—full address of recipient
c. Salutation
d. Body—should be in paragraph form
e. Closing
f. Signature

> The elements should be found in the order as listed above. However, due to many acceptable letter styles, we cannot specify a particular one. Thus, we should not be concerned with *one* correct form of indentation, spatial position on page, and alignment. Students should consistently adhere to one chosen format, however. (16, p. 38)

Stimulus. Give students the following topic:

> You just received a sweatshirt you ordered from Ajax Company, 12 Tarp Road, Columbus, Ohio 12345. However, the company misspelled the name of your school on the front of the shirt. Therefore, you would like to return it for one on which the name is correctly spelled. Write a letter to Ajax asking how to exchange this sweatshirt for the one you want.

Discussion. First, review the information that is required for the various components of a business letter (heading, inside address, salutation, body, closing, signature). Then, ask students to put themselves in the position of Ajax Company and discuss what information they would need to exchange the sweatshirt.

Rough Draft. Have students write a rough draft of the business letter to Ajax Company. They should pay particular attention to the body of the letter while making sure they have included all the necessary information in each of the six components.

Skills Instruction. Have students insert correct punctuation and capitalization in the following business letter.

1946 bybee street
tuscon texas 12345

april 12 1985

sound record company
12 round street
musicalla oregon 54321

dear sound record company

Last week I received a copy of "sound off" by the Group when I opened the record I noticed a long scratch on it obviously I could not play it I have enclosed the damaged record with the sales slip for your inspection please send me a new record to replace the damaged one.

Thank you for your cooperation.

sincerely,

rolph jones

After students have corrected the punctuation, have them answer the following questions:

1. What was the problem with the record?
2. What does Rolph want the company to do?
3. Where should Sound Company send the replacement record?
4. Given the information in Rolph's letter, would you send him a replacement record?

Sharing/Revision. Have students work in pairs to review each other's compositions using the discussion questions that follow as a guide. After the compositions have been reviewed and discussed, have students revise them, taking into account the comments and new information.

1. What was the problem with the sweatshirt?
2. What does the writer want the company to do?
3. Where should Ajax Company send the replacement sweatshirt?
4. Given the information in the writer's letter, would you send a replacement?

Submission. Have students proofread their compositions using the proofreading checklist that follows and submit their compositions for formal response.

1. _____ I have used the correct business form including heading, inside address, salutation, body, closing, and signature.
2. _____ I have explained the problem.
3. _____ I have stated what I wish the company to do.
4. _____ I have spelled words correctly.
5. _____ I have used correct punctuation.

Expository Writing

Since most writing tests require some type of expository writing, it is important that students know the general patterns expected. Readers look for an introduction, a well-developed body, and a conclusion. Within each of these areas the writer should follow some general guidelines.

Introduction

The introduction should move from a general idea to a specific opinion or thesis statement. In addition, it should also provide structural clues to guide the reader through the body of the work. Finally, the introduction should provide some incentive for reading the rest of the composition. This may be accomplished through specific techniques such as an appropriate quotation, an anecdote, a dramatic example of the thesis, or a startling statement. The introduction is a vital component of the composition because it establishes the frame of reference for the reader. The better the introduction, the more positively the reader will approach the remainder of the work.

Stimulus/Discussion. To prepare students to write an essay on the interaction between American Indians and colonists, have them collect information on the topic by assigning small groups to research different tribes and early American colonies. After they have completed their data gathering, discuss the various interactions as a full class, writing comments and notes on the board.

Rough Draft. Have students write a rough draft of an essay describing the interaction of a specific American Indian tribe and early American colonists.

Skills Instruction. Discuss the components of a good introductory paragraph with students, stressing thesis and structural clues. Then have students complete the following worksheet on introductions.

WORKSHEET: INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH

Directions: Read the paragraph below and answer the questions.

Often when different cultures make initial contact, the resulting conflicts are devastating to at least one of the parties. This was certainly true when American Indians encountered the early colonists. First, distrust, disdain, and greed laid the grounds for violent warfare. Second, the influx of new cultures brought new diseases to the New World, devastating vast numbers of American Indians. Finally, as the colonists gained in power, vast numbers of Indians were forced to move from their homelands. As a result of these factors, contact between colonists and natives resulted in tragic losses, especially for the latter.

Questions:

1. What is the thesis of the essay?
2. How does the writer attempt to capture the interest of the reader?
3. What are the major structural clues in this paragraph?
4. What do you expect the writer to discuss in the body of the paragraph and in what order?

Sharing/Revision. Have students work in pairs reading each other's compositions. As they discuss their work, have them pay particular attention to the following questions:

1. What is the thesis of the essay?
2. How does the writer attempt to capture the interest of the reader?
3. What are the major structural clues in this paragraph?
4. What do you expect the writer to discuss in the body of the paragraph and in what order?

Submission. After students have proofread their work using the proofreading form that follows, have them submit the essays for evaluation.

PROOFREADING CHECKLIST

I have—

1. _____ Checked the spelling of words.
2. _____ Capitalized proper nouns and names (for example, John, Plymouth, Cherokee, Trail of Tears).
3. _____ Checked the agreement of subjects and predicates (for example, *None* of us *is* going).
4. _____ Used pronouns correctly (for example, Neither Bill nor John brought *his* book).
5. _____ Checked that all verbs are in the appropriate tense.

Signed: _____

Body

The body of the exposition should follow the format suggested by the clues in the introduction. Not only do readers look for concrete examples or arguments reflecting the thesis, but they also watch for appropriate use of transitions.

Stimulus/Discussion. Have the class discuss responses to the topic: Defend or reject the statement: "The arts should be part of the standard curriculum for all students." List their comments on the chalkboard and categorize them into pro and con groups.

Rough Draft. Have students write a rough draft of an essay on that topic.

Skills Instruction. Have students complete the "Skills Worksheet" that follows and then discuss their responses as a full class.

SKILLS WORKSHEET: TRANSITIONS

Directions: Read the paragraph below and circle the transitions that you find in the passage. Then fill in the blanks with appropriate transitions from the list at the bottom of the page.

Use of the arts in instruction not only provides creative outlets, but it also exposes individuals to alternative modes of acquiring concepts. _____ use of the arts in the curriculum also provides additional opportunities for students to communicate their understandings and feelings to others. _____ some individuals fall easily into the mold of the traditional students, learning effectively through lecture and reading, _____ others learn better through other media. These students should have an equal opportunity to learn. _____ a variety of methods and media, including the arts, should be incorporated as often as possible in the standard curriculum.

Transitions: first, second, therefore, moreover, in addition, whereas, in short, finally, next, then, while, on the other hand, of course, even so, thus, although.

Sharing/Revision. Have students work in small groups to read and share their essays using the following questions as initial points of discussion. Then, the writers should revise their work according to the comments and any new information or ideas.

1. What is the thesis of the essay?
2. What are the main arguments the writer uses to support the thesis?
3. What are at least three transitions the writer used?

Submission. After proofreading their essays carefully for structural and mechanical errors, the writers should submit them for evaluation.

Conclusion

The conclusion of an essay is sometimes the most difficult to construct yet it may make the difference between passing or failing a writing test. The last impression the writer makes on the reader has a strong influence on the general impression of the work. Writers can employ one of the following methods of concluding their works:

making a final point, summarizing the arguments, applying the thesis to a general situation, or making a personal statement about the thesis.

Stimulus/Discussion. After students have had an opportunity to study various impacts of progress on the environment, discuss this issue with the class. List their ideas on the board.

Rough Draft. Have students write a rough draft of a composition on the impact of "progress" on the environment.

Skills Instruction. Discuss ways writers often conclude arguments (for example, making a final point, summarizing the arguments, applying the thesis to a general situation, or making a personal statement about the thesis). Have students read the passage below and then discuss the questions that follow. Finally, discuss other ways the writer could have concluded the paragraph.

> Exposure to noise has steadily risen as a result of population growth and invention of more and more mechanical devices. Motor vehicles are a main source of noise. The problem is worse in cities where there are large numbers of cars and people. But residential areas, country, towns, and even wilderness areas have not escaped the increase in noise in the past 20 years. Homes are often havens for a variety of noises, including radios, television, stereos, and lawn mowers. Research studies have shown that at least 80 million people are exposed to noise levels that interfere with normal activities, creating anxiety and, sometimes, dangers to hearing. Therefore, if we are not more careful about the noise pollution in our environment, we may seriously affect our physical wellbeing as well as our quality of life.

1. What transition does the writer use to introduce the concluding sentence?
2. What conclusion is the writer drawing?
3. What arguments does the writer use to support the conclusion?

Sharing/Revision. Have students work in pairs to share their compositions, using the following questions for conclusions. After the discussion students should revise their works, taking the comments into account.

1. What transition does the writer use to introduce the concluding sentence?
2. What conclusion is the writer drawing?
3. What arguments does the writer use to support the conclusion?

Submission. Have students edit their compositions carefully for structural and mechanical problems and submit them for evaluation.

SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES

This section contains descriptions of four writing activities that several educators have used with their classes. These exercises focus on the following areas: (1) introducing the importance of the main idea or thesis statement, (2) a group approach to rewriting, (3) the use of peer review groups for evaluating students' writing, and (4) preparing students for in-class essays.

Teaching the Thesis Statement Through Description

Robert C. Rosen

According to writing textbooks, the focus of an essay resides in its thesis statement. Students who have difficulty understanding the function of such a statement might benefit from the exercise described by Robert C. Rosen of William Paterson College, Wayne, New Jersey.

Author's Comment

The following exercise is a useful and entertaining way to introduce the importance of a thesis or main idea in a piece of writing.

The Thesis Statement Exercise

I begin by choosing one student as a model and asking everyone in the class (the model included) to write in ten or fifteen minutes a physical description of him or her. The model should stand for a second, to reveal height, and should sit clearly visible to all (it's easiest if chairs are in a circle). Some students may think they are finished writing after two or three perfunctory sentences, so it may be necessary to prod them, reminding them that there are four billion people in the world and their descriptions must single out one.

You must, of course, choose your model with care, preferably in advance, and with a substitute or two in mind in case your choice is absent or unwilling to be volunteered. Your model should be confident and not unattractive, to avoid risk of hurt feelings. You should also be prepared for the possibility that students will suggest *you* as the model. From experience, I'd recommend against agreeing to that.

Ask several students to read their descriptions aloud, and tell the listeners to close their eyes and try to visualize a person as they hear each description. They'll probably find it difficult, because most of the descriptions will simply be lists of facts—brown hair, glasses, white blouse, Jordache jeans, and so forth. Eventually, though, a judgment or generalization will appear, and you will be able to discuss the difference between objective and subjective description, between fact and opinion, and perhaps also succeed in eliciting some suggestions about what makes a description effective.

Don't carry this discussion too far, however. Instead, hand out a ditto of the following two paragraphs (these are just samples):

A. Sally Jones has blond hair, blue eyes, and stands about 5'4" tall. She wears wire-rimmed glasses and a thin gold chain around her neck. Her ears are large, her nose small, and her mouth about average. She is wearing a white blouse, open at the neck, a large red belt, and designer jeans. Her shoes have high, pointed heels, and no back. There is a high school ring on the fourth finger of her right hand and a large, ornate silver ring (it looks Mexican) on the middle finger of her left hand.

B. Joe Smith looks tired. The medium-length brown hair that only partly covers his head is lifeless and thinning. His gray eyes are only half open, and his lower lids sag down beside his large, pockmarked nose. His large mouth (which he never opens) literally droops at the corners. His face is quite pale. Joe is wearing scuffed brown loafers, baggy tan corduroy trousers, and a faded blue flannel shirt, only partly tucked in.

Read these two paragraphs aloud and ask the students to close their eyes and try to visualize each person. Then ask how the descriptions differ, which is better, and why. With little or no prompting the class will conclude that B has a main idea, a point to make, and that this holds it together and enables the reader really to see the individual described. The reason, I'd guess, is that we cannot absorb a series of unrelated details, as in A—it's too much to remember at once. The thesis in B gives us something to hang all its details on, something to organize them around in our mind. From here you can easily generalize to the virtue of a thesis in all kinds of writing.

To make the point clearer and to give the class practice creating (discovering?) and supporting a thesis, you should choose a second model and tell your students to study the model for a few minutes in order to come up with a main impression or the thesis before they start writing their descriptions. Tell them to announce their thesis in their first sentence, or topic sentence, and then to select and shape their details as much as possible (without distortion) to support it. Remind them that not every detail need prove their point; their goal is still accuracy, not caricature. Again, you should choose a safe model, and also—if you want to try to control the situation—one that suggests several clear theses.

When these second descriptions are read aloud, ask the students to listen for how well the details support the thesis. You might ask to hear all the first sentences before starting, and then select readers to maximize variety. This round of descriptions will undoubtedly be better than the first.

As a substitute for or addition to this second step, you might simply debate how to describe a particular member of the class. Encourage your students to argue for the various theses they come up with. And for each suggested thesis, challenge them to draft as many details as possible into its service. You might also, at this point, mention the possibility of a description with more than one thesis, a description of several paragraphs.

The entire exercise can be done in one class period. And it can be an opportunity to loosen up the class a bit. In any case, you should follow it up with a homework assignment—to describe a friend, or perhaps to describe a famous person, in which case you might read the descriptions aloud next time and ask the class to guess who's being described. (25)

Magazine Advertisement Analysis: A Group Approach to Rewriting

William Rogalski

> By engaging students in collaborative writing tasks, William Rogalski reinforces the importance of audience and purpose along with revision. Mr. Rogalski submitted this exercise from the University of Vermont in Burlington.

Author's Comment

As a teacher who approaches composition as a four-part process—prewriting, writing, rewriting, and editing—I find describing rewriting to my students to be a great obstacle. Too often they see it as preliminary editing—changing punctuation marks and correcting grammatical errors. The point of this exercise is to demonstrate that rewriting often encompasses such major changes as radical shifts in focus, addition and deletion of information, and reordering of paragraphs.

I teach writing by rhetorical modes and find that analysis is well suited for

the group assignment. I begin by explaining the basic types of analysis—functional, structural, causal, and process—and apply each to a simple object, a desk or chair for example. I then ask the class to apply these analytical methods to other simple objects, and once I am sure they have the feel for the process, I have them form groups of three. I specify that they should be analyzing magazine advertisements and give them a few suggested topics: sex or nature as themes in advertisement, stereotypes, class values, verbal trickery, use of photographs or headlines. I point out that these are only starting points and encourage them to pursue any project within the basic limit of advertisement analysis. What I stress is that they should examine a broad variety of ads and consider the patterns they can find. My students tend to approach each paper as an argument with a thesis to present and support. You must emphasize that they shouldn't begin with a thesis and then look for documentation for it in the ads but that they should instead be looking for recurring patterns in whatever area it is they are examining. I also allow a great deal of freedom in the choice of that area. The approaches they take to the analysis are usually far more interesting than anything I could suggest. I shall describe the exercise according to the schedule I follow, using four seventy-five minute classes over a two-week period.

Rewriting Activity

First Class
After the introduction to analysis, the class breaks into groups of three. Each group decides on a basic approach to the assignment and on what magazines each member should examine. The assignment for the next class asks students to collect and briefly analyze (according to the approach the group has decided on) five ads. They should write fifty- to seventy-five-word notes on each ad.

Second Class
In this class each group produces a joint prewriting sheet from the ads it has collected. The group elects a secretary to take down in triplicate the prewriting information. The basic structure of the paper should be decided on now, and each student is asked to write a first draft of 500 words for the next class from the prewriting material. Students should be reminded to bring in three copies of their first drafts.

Third Class
Students meet in their groups, exchange and examine drafts, and comment on the effectiveness of each. At this point I have them concentrate on the large issues—structure, ideas, continuity, logic—and not merely on grammatical correctness or stylistic subtleties. Each group decides which of the three drafts is best and how it can be improved. Each student is asked to rewrite the group's best draft for the next class.

Fourth Class
Students meet in their groups and decide how to produce a final draft from the second drafts they have at hand. Some groups will probably choose the best draft one member has produced and discuss how to improve it, while other groups will probably decide that their final draft should incorporate the best parts of all second drafts. Each group should elect someone to be responsible for shaping the final draft, again of 500 words, into final form for submission.

Aside from showing students that radical changes in drafts often bring radical changes in quality, the exercise has other benefits: students are motivated when they know that someone other than the teacher will read their drafts; students find it easy to be objective about the quality of writing when a paper is a group effort; students see that an abundance of prewriting material—much of which will be discarded—is necessary for a good paper; and students get to know each other well through writing together. (24)

A Peer Review Process for Developmental Writers

Lynne Spigelmire

Using peer review groups in the writing class has become a popular method for making students more responsible for evaluation of their own work. Lynne Spigelmire outlines one procedure for organizing and implementing the peer review process. Ms. Spigelmire is at Boston University in Massachusetts.

Author's Comment

Developmental or beginning writers characteristically have a very vague sense of audience, and therefore find it difficult to distance themselves from the "texts" they have written, and then to criticize these texts as part of preparation for revision. Because beginning writers need to become "naive readers," or critics of their own written work, they need guidance not only in getting started (that is, in learning how to use invention procedures fruitfully), but also in examining one another's work through a structured peer review process. After repeatedly applying critical standards to first versions written by their peers, students are able to judge their own first versions, using the same criteria as they did in peer review. Thus, in a developmental writing course, peer review is a necessary prelude to teaching revision. The rationale for peer review is this: if students can learn to recognize weaknesses and strengths in their writing, then they are ready to devise successful strategies for revision.

Exercise

The peer review process I use in my two-semester freshman composition course requires each student to prepare one original and two copies of a first draft on the assigned topic. The drafts may be handwritten or typed, but must be double-spaced. At the beginning of the first semester, my explanation of the peer review protocol usually elicits a mixed response from students. Those who have been introduced to peer review in the past and have found it helpful accept the process as a normal part of a writing course. However, these students are usually a small minority. Some students balk, out of shyness or skepticism about the critical skills of their classmates. Nevertheless, on the first day of peer review, most students appear with copies of their essays. Except for three or four students in each section of 25 to 30, students generally continue to participate fully in the peer review sessions during both semesters, producing a total of eight peer evaluations over 28 weeks of instruction.

Before preparing the final version of each essay assigned during the course, students go through the following steps: completion of various heuristic procedures, discussion of writing plans with the instructor, preparation of the first version, peer review, and optional conference with the instructor. Students are asked to complete specific heuristic procedures for each assignment, and to hand them in. Then, they receive assignment sheets listing the essay's topic, prescribed in length (usually 500 words), and due dates for first and final versions.

Sample Assignment

Paper No. 1: Description/Narration

Topic: An important relationship in your life which contains (or contained) dissonance for you

Recommended length: two pages, typed, double-spaced

First version due: September 24, by class time (Make two copies for peer review)

Final version due: October 1, 4:00 p.m.

The assignment sheet also reminds students that each essay should have an introductory paragraph with audience appeal and orientation, functional paragraphs, each with a clear organizing idea or topic sentence, and a conclusion or appropriate closure. In addition, the assignment sheet reminds students to review the two checklists for conventions and mechanics on our departmental Theme Analysis Blank, which must be submitted along with each final version.

Establishing Peer Review Groups

In September, I establish year-long peer review groups, randomly dividing each class into clusters of three or four students. After the second round of peer reviews, I make minor changes in those groups which contain more than one "no show" (often students whose writing anxiety prevents them from producing a first version on time, or who are dogmatically opposed to the notion of peer review). Each group decides whether writers will read first versions aloud, or whether peer critics will read copies of the draft silently before completing the required Peer Review Analysis Form.

The Peer Review Analysis Form is useful because it provides a list of relatively objective criteria. Students who are just beginning to learn about audience appeal and the importance of unified, coherent paragraphs often regress when they are called upon to write an extended discourse. Early in the semester, Peer Review Analysis Forms are rather simple and straightforward like this one, asking student-critics to focus on the beginning and concluding paragraphs of the essay, and to locate specific details which appeal to the senses. Each peer review process requires critics to give authors specific guidelines for revision, since students have a full week between completion of peer review and due date for the final version of the essay.

Each peer review process takes two fifty-minute sessions. If students are unable to complete their peer reviews within the allotted class time, they must make arrangements to meet outside class, or to exchange papers overnight or over a weekend; this arrangement evolved out of student-initiated meetings outside class time, and has proven acceptable to most students. As the Sample Peer Review Analysis Form illustrates, student critics are required to check for the presence of various components of the essay, and to cite specific features such as descriptions. Student critics also are asked to give an overall evaluation of the essay, citing the author's successes and making suggestions for revision.

During the first peer review session, I review the ground rules briefly, then have student groups begin reading one another's essays. I sit in with each group for ten minutes or so, sometimes participating in the review process to insure that everyone understands the procedure. For the entire first semester, I avoid asking critics to point out cosmetic or mechanical errors, since I believe this leads to an erroneous perception of peer review as "just editing" or "correcting the spelling." Late in the second semester, however, one entire peer review session is given over to proofreading and copy editing.

Once students have completed their reviews of first versions and have filled out the Peer Review Analysis Form in duplicate, using carbon paper, critics re-

Peer Review Analysis Form

Assignment No. 1: Description/Narration of an Important Relationship

Author of Essay _____ Peer Critic _____

Title of Essay _____

I. Introductory Paragraph(s)	Satisfactory	Suggestions for Revision
Audience Appeal Step		
Orientation of Audience		
II. Body Does each paragraph have a topic or organizing idea?		
Are there enough specific examples? Cite one description which appeals to reader's sense of sight: _____ _____ Cite one description which appeals to reader's sense of hearing or touch: _____ _____ Are transitions clear?		
Does time sequence make sense to you?		
Are you aware of writer's sense of dissonance in this relationship? State of dissonance: _____		
III. Conclusion Is the dissonance resolved? Do you have a clear sense of an ending?		
IV. Peer critic's summary: Write a paragraph in which you give your suggestions for revision. Also mention what you like about the essay—what the author should *keep*.		

This form should be filled out in duplicate. Use carbon paper. Return one copy to author, the other to your instructor.

turn one copy of the form to the essay's author, and one form to me. Student critics receive an evaluation from me for their critical work, according to a pass/high pass/fail system. Before authors revise their first versions and submit them for a grade, each author reads the three Analysis Forms, confers individually with me if necessary, then makes final revisions and prepares the typescript of the final version.

By the end of the second semester, student response to peer review continues to be somewhat mixed, but in a final series of memos and self-assessments of writing progress, the majority of students acknowledge the usefulness of peer response, as a prelude to the instructor's evaluation of the final versions, and as the first step in learning about revision. In addition, students gradually learn that their peers can be competent readers and critics. Thus, they begin to have a sharper sense of actual readers in the real world, and the difficulties those readers can and do encounter. (28)

A Twenty-Minute Exercise for In-Class Essays

Ronald E. Smith

Students faced with the prospect of writing in-class essays often express bewilderment about handling such a task. This exercise is designed to show students how to organize their time, topic, and writing to meet the requirements of in-class writing. Mr. Smith teaches at the University of North Alabama in Florence.

Author's Comment

This exercise is designed for a community college composition class, but it is adaptable to any class that involves graded, in-class writing assignments. I first began working on the exercise several years ago to help my students prepare for department-required in-class essays. The time limit on the essays was two hours. For anyone who has never had to write in such a situation, two hours may seem like a rather long time, but many of my students complained that they had hardly begun before I announced that it was time for them to move on to their conclusions. Some of the students even failed to complete an essay in the two hours allotted. It did not take many personal observations or student conferences to discover what the problem was. Many of the students were taking up to twenty minutes just to stare at the assignment sheet before beginning their essays and even then some of the students would experience several false starts before actually beginning to write. In short, much of the class was spending one-fifth, or longer, of its writing time just trying to get started. It was clear, needless to say, that these students were in need of some form of guidance if they were to have a reasonable opportunity to complete their assignments. It was in an attempt to provide this guidance that I developed the twenty-minute exercise for in-class essays. I reasoned that if at least twenty minutes of the students' time for writing the essay was being wasted, they had nothing to lose by spending that amount of time preparing for their assignment in class.

The Twenty-Minute Exercise

The basic outline of the exercise is really quite simple. The students are given a handout that has six timed steps and a list of topics to draw from. There is nothing magic about the topics and any number of substitutions can be made. It is important, however, to have a variety of topics to choose from as this will give the students practice at selecting a single topic from several choices. Although the topics are normally at the bottom of the handout, for the sake of illustration I will put them at the beginning of my explanation of the exercise.

cars	dorm life	music
cafeteria	drugs	Saturdays
college	houses	songs
bikes	hobbies	sports
books	hiking	television
buses	movies	trips

1. Select one of the topics listed above (2 minutes).
   It is important to stress that the two minutes is a time limitation, and it is not necessary to spend the entire time selecting a topic. Students move on to the next step as soon as they have selected a topic—any time saved is used in the next step.

2. Write all that you can think of on that topic (7 minutes).
   The concern here should be with getting information down on paper, not on grammar or punctuation. Also, while the seven minutes is only another time limitation, students should be encouraged to use the full amount of time on this step. For those students who insist that they have all the information that they can think of or that is needed, the instructor should look at their papers before letting them move on to step 3. It is helpful to point out that this is not a race or a contest.

3. From the material that you have, select the points that you feel to be the most important (3 minutes).
   All that the students need do here is underline or circle the points that they feel are the most important to the understanding of their topics.

4. Develop a working thesis (3 minutes).
   This is where the students have the most problems, both on the exercise and while writing in class generally. This is where the students really have to decide what to write about—what to focus on. For those students who really have a problem with developing a thesis, I simply suggest that the first few times they use a pattern something like *The purpose of this paper is . . . .*

5. Select the points that can be used in developing and supporting your thesis (2 minutes).
   This is done by numbering the selections or by indicating them in any manner that the student finds to be effective. It is a good idea to suggest to the students that it may be a good idea to take a closer look at those points selected earlier as being important as well as those points passed over. They may find, in light of the working thesis that has been developed, that the importance of these points has shifted.

6. Write a thesis statement that accurately reflects the work already completed (3 minutes).
   This is really nothing more than a check and a possible revision of the thesis developed in step four.

Evaluation

Some instructors may feel that students are losing valuable time if they spend the first twenty minutes doing what I prescribe here. I would disagree, however, for this form of prewriting is really putting the students to work on their assignment, not keeping them from their writing. Instead of just sitting there and trying to think of something to say or where to begin, the students are actually starting on their papers during the first few minutes of class. Although I have no hard statistics to support this method, I do have personal observations that show my students writing from the beginning of the class rather than just staring at the assignment sheet. I also have student papers that show increasing improvement in organization and development on assignments written in class. There is also a good deal of positive feedback from the students based on this assignment. I do not treat this exercise as a panacea, however, for all of the problems that are encountered while writing an in-class essay, nor is it being presented as one. It will not work for every student, but what will? (27)

FINAL NOTE

William W. West of the University of South Florida offers students several suggestions for taking a writing test.

1. When you get your question or subjects for writing, select one only. If you are given several choices, do not try to impress the raters by writing on more than one.
2. Look at your watch (or clock) and write down the time. Divide the time roughly into sixths. Use the first sixth (or at least five minutes) for planning and the last sixth (or at least five minutes) for revising and proofreading. The time between these sixths is for writing.
3. At the beginning of your planning time, pick out the key word (the subject or topic) and put it in the center of your scratch paper. Then, as fast as you can think of them, jot down ideas you have about the subject. Put positive points toward the left and negative ones toward the right.
4. Then write at the bottom of the scratch paper these words: "I believe strongly that _____ _____." In the first blank space place the key words (the subject or topic) and in the second blank space what you believe about it. You will have a sentence such as "I believe strongly that a *college education* is *necessary for financial success*."
5. Next, eliminate the words "I believe strongly that." This will leave you with the topic sentence, "A college education is necessary for financial success."
6. Now ask yourself "why?" you believe as you do. Then answer with three or more clauses beginning with "because." One clause might be "because those with a college education often achieve higher management positions than those without a college education."
7. Try to think of at least one concrete example, statistic, or logically reasoned argument for each of the "because" clauses. You might begin writing the first "because" section before thinking of the support for the other two. Often, ideas for the others come while working on the first.
8. Finally, in the last sixth (or at least five minutes) reread your paper, making clear, neat corrections where necessary. (36)

As West notes, this system is effective for writing production tests, but it is too restrictive to be the primary method for all writing. Students should experiment with other ways of approaching other types of writing. This caution is appropriate for most of the exercises in Part 3.

Appendix

SECTION 1. TRAIT SCORING GUIDE

Rhetorical Mode. Explanatory—Business Letter

Primary Trait. The directive requires respondents to communicate clearly the information necessary to explain the situation. Since the information is given, the writer needs to recognize the pertinent details and transcribe them in a manner that conforms to the conventions of business letter writing. The main issue, however, is, will the letter accomplish its purpose? The tone and style of the letter are of lesser importance.

General Scoring Rationale. The main criteria for rating this exercise are the presence and accuracy of the information transmitted. The basic task is accomplished if the writer is identified, the situation is explained, and a directive is given. The other information serves to amplify the letter and increase the chances that the company will be able to solve the problem.

Scoring Guide Categories:

0 = No response

1 = The letter is in some crucial sense incomplete. The writer is not identified and/or the situation is not explained and/or a directive is not given.

2 = The writer is identified, reference is made to both the bill/collection letter and the product, and at least implies the company should clear up the matter.

3 = The writer identifies account number or name and address, refers to bill/collection letter, denies receiving product and gives clear direction for future action.

4 = The writer identifies account number, name and address, mentions date and receipt of bill/letter, denies receiving product and gives clear direction for future action. The letter also includes other information such as stating the length of time or number of bills received, or a mention of efforts related to trying to stop the repeated billing. The writer may also offer copies of the back order letter or bills. (14, pp. 70–75)

SECTION 2. COMPETENCY TEST SAMPLE

SAMPLE STUDENT RESPONSES: 1984 and 1985

Writing Topic 1: Narrative Domain

SCORING GUIDE

Score point 1 = Although the writing task is attempted, these papers are typically brief. They have sufficient evidence the writer saw the prompt and attempted to respond to it, but the writer does not sustain any of the ideas.

- There are few details.
- Sequencing or listing of details is minimal or there is no apparent sequence. Sometimes, the writer strings together disjointed details, so that the sequence is confusing.
- An organizational strategy, if present, is unclear.
- The writer may not address the intended audience.
- Errors in sentence formation and conventions interfere with meaning and cause confusion for the reader.

Score point 2 = These papers typically address the writing task, though there is little, if any, development.

- They have specific details, but the details may not be elaborated.
- These responses have a sustained narrative sequence, but the sequence is weak for one of the following reasons:
  (a) the sequence consists of a list of unelaborated details.
  (b) the sequence is brief, with few details, but it is controlled and the details are somewhat elaborated.
  (c) the sequence is sustained and some of the details may be elaborated, but the organization is poorly executed creating interruptions in the logical progression of the narrative.
- The writer attempts to address the intended audience.
- Errors in sentence formation and conventions, if present, may interfere with meaning

Score point 3 = These papers are typically organized and controlled. The narrative progresses logically without interruption. The papers may not be fully developed.

- The details are at least somewhat elaborated, although not necessarily evenly.
- A sustained sequence of linked details is present.
- The writer addresses the intended audience appropriately.
- Errors in sentence formation and conventions, if present, do not interfere with meaning.

Score point 4 = These papers typically have enough or more than enough information to complete the writing task. The information is clearly developed and the response reads as an organized, controlled whole.

- The sequencing of events, ideas or details is clear and consistent.
- The paper is evenly developed through elaboration of the details.
- An organizational strategy is sustained and the response reads smoothly.
- The writer addresses the intended audience appropriately.
- Errors in sentence formation and conventions, if present, do not interfere with meaning or interrupt the reading.

1985

WRITING TOPIC #1

Suppose your teacher has asked you to tell about the first time you were allowed to do something on your own. This may have happened recently or long ago. Write a letter telling your teacher what happened when you did something on your own for the first time.

Before you begin writing, think about when you did something on your own for the first time. Think about what happened and what you did. Think about how it ended.

Now, write a letter telling your teacher what happened when you did something on your own for the first time.

Note: You may use any name and address for your letter.

Dear Mrs. Jones

The first time I did something on my own in school is when my teacher had to do her Enlish Work. The work I had to do it was in the Enlish Book. That work was to hard for me "But" I tride and I got it all write. Then then the 2 Second time I did something on my own is when I was in Histhy and I had to do my question in my History Book. "But" I had to do 5 min of work or I had to do 10 question and that's the only time I did something on myf own.

Score point 1: This paper briefly mentions two times the writer did something on his/her own. This approach promotes a listing strategy that does not sustain a narrative sequence. Convention errors interfere with meaning.

Dear Mr. Smith;

I'm writing to tell you about my first date last summer. The guy I went out with is a senior at William High. The evening began at 6:00 pm. he picked me up at my house in a red Ford Escort, we left to go to the movies and see "Where the Boys are "84."" We had a wonderfull time at the movies.

From the movies we went to the lake where we met some of our friends to walk along the lake with us, by then it was 10:00 pm. so we went to Roy for something to eat.

After we ate he drove me home and stayed at my house until 12:00 midnight. That was the most exciting and wonderful nights of my life.

Truly yours

Score point 2: This paper relates the story of a first date. The brief sequence gives some details, but there is little elaboration. There are no sentence formation or convention errors that interfere with meaning.

Dear Mr. Jones,

I am writing this letter to tell about the first time a teacher ever let me do something on my own. I always like to write to my friends on how I'm doing in school, Anyway

It began April fourth. I went into shop class I took down some notes on shop safety. Then the class went into the huge Shoproom. Mr. Anderson, our polite shop instructor, would never let anybody use the table saw. Since he was busy he asked me to cut a board for him. I walked towards the table saw.

I made it over to the table saw. I measured the board and slowly pushed the power switch. It hummed loud. I sat the board on the table. I was so nervous that I was shaking. I grabbed the miter gauge and cut the board. I really calmed down after I cut the board.

Five minutes before class let out, Mr. Anderson came to me. He told me that I did a great job on the table saw and said I could use it during class. I really feel proud and self confident in myself. Thanks for reading my letter.

Your friend,

Score point 3: This paper relates the story of the first time the writer was allowed to use a table saw alone. The sequence that begins when he enters shop class progresses logically. The writer's topic covers a short period of time, and he relates the details with some elaboration. The narrative is not fully developed. There are no sentence formation or convention errors that interfere with meaning.

40 Harden Lane
Newton, Ma. 32308
April 18, 1985

Dear Mrs. Smith,

Before I turned the age of nine my mother never allowed me to cook on my own. However, once I became nine it was permitted I cooked breakfast without any help or advise from mother.

At first, I had a hard time choosing the contents of my meal. I thought of making Something diffcult such as french toast but decided against it since it was only my first time. Finally after some thought I made a conclusion I decided simple toast, bacon, and eggs would do just fine.

Now it was time to begin to cook. I made the eggs first by putting them minus the shells in a bowl, mixing them with a fork and adding milk, salt, and pepper. Then I poured the eggs into a frying pan and placed them over the stove. After waiting a few momments, the eggs started to group so I began to stir them. Soon the egg mix was turned into scrambled eggs. I placed them on a plate and went on to the rest of my meal.

I decided to speed things up slightly. I

made both the toast and the bacon at the same time. I took out two pieces of toast and placed four strips into a clean frying pan. After a minute or two the toast popped out of the toaster and the bacon began to get crisp. After turning over the bacon I took the toast out of the toaster, butter — ed it and placed it on my plate. After this the bacon was ready so I also set it on my plate

Eventhough the meal was cooked I wasn't quite finished. I made sure the heat was turned off on the stove and the toaster was unplugged. then I cleaned the counter and washed the dishes Only after this was finished I was ready to eat my first self-made meal.

Yours Truly,

Score point 4: This paper relates the first time the writer cooked a meal alone. The sequence is detailed and evenly elaborated. The organization is controlled. There are no sentence formation or convention errors that interfere with meaning.

SECTION 3. COLLEGE BOARD TEST SAMPLE

The Essay

At the December administration of the Achievement Tests, the English Composition Achievement Test includes a 20-minute essay on an assigned topic and 40 minutes of multiple-choice questions. Although the essay version of the test is offered at both the Saturday and Sunday administrations, the topics and questions for each day are different.

Because all students at one administration must write on the same topic, the topic must be one that they can react to and begin writing about almost immediately. The faculty committee that selects the topic looks for one that students can respond to readily and in a variety of ways and that allows different students to argue for different points of view.

How the Essays are Scored

Each December, about 150 high school and college English teachers gather for one week to read and score the essays. At this session, each of the approximately 82,000 essays is scored by two different readers. The readers are aware of the quality of writing they can expect from students at the end of high school or at the beginning of college. Therefore, they do not have unrealistic expectations of what you can accomplish in 20 minutes.

The essays written for the English Composition Achievement Test are scored holistically; that is, they are read for the total impression they make on the reader. This total impression is created by every aspect of the essay; spelling, punctuation, organization, choice of words, and the host of other characteristics of writing are all considered. Readers are instructed to read the essays quickly and to score immediately while their impression of the total essay remains fresh. Further, the reader who scores holistically is encouraged to look at what students have done well rather than at what they have failed to do. The scorer does not mark a paper for errors.

Essays are scored on a four-point scale, with four as the highest score and one as the lowest. The total essay score is the sum of the two readers' scores and is weighted to equal one-third of the total English Composition Achievement Test score. Any papers that receive two widely divergent scores are read a third time to resolve the discrepancies.

The English Composition Achievement Test is meant to provide an indication of your total writing ability (when writing ability is defined as the ability to do the kind of writing required in most college classes). That is, the test is not meant to analyze particular strengths or weaknesses in a student's writing ability. Therefore, no subscore for the essay alone is reported. The total score reported is based on both the weighted score on the essay and the score on the multiple-choice questions.

Sample Essays

The following sample essays are actual students' essays set in type from the handwritten texts. The errors in them are the ones the students themselves made. Some of the errors in the papers are, of course, simply the result of haste. As a group, the sample essays suggest the variety of student responses and the range of writing competence shown by the student authors. The discussion that follows each sample essay addresses its specific strengths and weaknesses, but no such analysis occurs during the reading.

The following directions appear in the test book given to students taking the English Composition Achievement Test with Essay.

Directions: You have twenty minutes to plan and write an essay on the topic assigned below. DO NOT WRITE ON ANOTHER TOPIC. AN ESSAY ON ANOTHER TOPIC IS NOT ACCEPTABLE.

The essay is assigned to give you an opportunity to show how well you can write. You should, therefore, take care to express your thoughts on the topic clearly and effectively. How well you write is much more important than how much you write, but to cover the topic adequately you may want to write more than one paragraph. Be specific.

Your essay must be written on the lines provided on your answer sheet. You will receive no other paper on which to write. You will find that you have enough space if you write on every line, avoid wide margins, and keep your handwriting to a reasonable size. It is important to remember that what you write will be read by someone who is not familiar with your handwriting. Try to write or print so that what you are writing is legible.

DO NOT WRITE IN YOUR TEST BOOK. You will receive credit only for what you write on your answer sheet.

The Essay Topic for December 4, 1982

Consider carefully the following quotation and the assignment following it. Then, plan and write your essay as directed.

"People seldom stand up for what they truly believe; instead they merely go along with the popular view."

Assignment: Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Write an essay in which you support your opinion with specific examples from history, contemporary affairs, literature, or personal observation.

Essays with a Total Score of 8 (Each reader gave the essay a score of 4.)

Although essays in this category differ in approach and style and have slight differences in quality, they all have the same characteristics: good organization, good command of the language, and an interesting style. These essays are not perfect, nor are they expected to be, for each is only a first draft written in the 20 minutes allotted. The essay below, which is representative of this category, received the highest possible score.

ESSAY I

Conformity is a necessary part of living in a society. People need one another to survive and must therefore often compromise their individual beliefs for the benefit of the whole. However, I think that the trend to conform is changing in recent decades in our society. People are often unwilling to express their views and stand up for them because they fear criticism. Yet recently, books and politics reflect more and more individual viewpoints and beliefs.

Politically, America has changed radically from the early 1900's. During the 1960's and through the present, people have felt increasingly unafraid to voice their arguments, though they may be against the popularly held view. Rallies against the Vietnam War and against racism began by a few standing out and disagreeing, such as Abbie Hoffman and Martin Luther King, Jr. Though these movements grew in strength and numbers until they became the popular viewpoint, they nevertheless began with people, who wouldn't give into pressure and wouldn't conform.

Non-conforming patterns are evident in late 20th-century literature as well. *Walden Two* by B.F. Skinner is a story of a group of people, headed by one man, who separated themselves from society and built and lived in a community which was the physical expression of their views. They felt that society was too competitive, forcing mankind to strive for unrealistic goals at the expense of happiness. Their society was an experiment in communal living without the pressures from society.

Conformity is a aspect of society which affects these who aren't strong enough to defy their peers. Conformity occurs most often among adolescents, who are the most susceptible to it. However, this trend is rapidly changing in today's society because of an increasing tolerance for different viewpoints.

Essay I has traditional structure: the first paragraph states the topic; the second and third present examples from books and politics, as mentioned in the last sentence of the first paragraph; the fourth concludes the essay, reaffirming what was said in the first paragraph. The essay is a unified statement in which the writer uses pertinent examples to support the opinion expressed. The sentence structure varies; the vocabulary is controlled and effective. Despite a bit of repetition in the last paragraph, the essay must be considered well done, given the 20-minute time limit imposed upon the writer.

Essays with a Total Score of 6 (Each reader gave the essay a score of 3.)

Essays in this category, as in every category, vary in quality. In this group, the essays might be described as ranging from good to merely competent. Although the papers show that the writers have a basic command of the skills needed for good writing, they have the kinds of flaws that keep them out of the highest range. They may lack such qualities as a forceful presentation or adequate development of the basic argument.

ESSAY II

I believe that many people do stand up for what they believe, but the majority of people merely go along with the popular view. This can be seen in everyday situations or can be seen in many examples in History.

I would say that the best example in History of people standing up for what they do believe has to be the early Christians. The early christians were looked down upon and persecuted for their beliefs but this did not stop them. Many of them died because of their beliefs. The christians were so heavily outnumbered that you cannot say that they went along with the popular view.

On the other hand many people do go along with the popular view. I often notice this when observing the teenagers. In certain situations they give in to peer pressure. For instance when other kids are drinking they also drink, in order to be part of the crowd. Some teenagers do this even when they dislike it merely to go along with the popular view.

I believe that this statement can be true of some people while not true of others. It really depends on the type of per-

son you are considering. If he is strong willed and outgoing he will probably do what he believes. If he is unsure of himself or insecure he will probably go along with the popular view.

Essay II is competently written. The writer of the essay takes a middle-of-the-road stance and presents that stance in the first paragraph. Supporting, but generalized, examples are provided and are followed by a conclusion. The essay, however, to some extent lacks force because the writer frequently employs "I believe" and "I would say." The writer relies heavily on the vague "this" and "it" to relate one idea to another. The sentence structure has little variation.

Essays with a Total Score of 4 (Each reader gave the essay a score of 2.)

Essays in this category, in comparison with the other essays being scored, have faults that override whatever merits they may have. Although the essays show that the writers have a fairly good grasp of English sentence structure, they usually have such problems as limited development of the argument, few explicit connections between ideas, and inexactness and ineffectiveness of expression.

ESSAY III

I would agree with this statement, because through my own personal observations I've notice that people will seldom stand up for what they believe, they usually go along with the popular view.

Through my own personal experience I found out that teenagers are always changing their thoughts and going along with the majority. The basic reason for this is "peer pressure". They feel that they will not fit in if they don't agree completely with the majority. Sometimes in my life I've done this, because I did not want to become a standout. I felt that I had to agree with my friends eventhough deep down I knew they were wrong. One example of this was during the past summer when a few of my friends and I went to a party. I really did not want to go, but since my friends went I felt obligated to go. Deep down I knew that if I did not go to the party my friends would desert me for life, but I still wanted to show up an image. If I did not go to the party my image would be

The writer of Essay III has constructed an argument and provided an example to support that argument, but does not express ideas precisely or concisely. This faulty expression of ideas is illustrated in ". . . teenagers are always changing their thoughts" and "One example of this was during the past summer when a few of my friends and I went to a party." In addition, the essay rambles. The organization is not strong; connecting words are not often used; words and ideas are repeated.

Essays with a Total Score of 2 (Each reader gave the essay a score of 1.)

Essays in this category are the poorest of those being scored. They are seriously flawed. No important feature of an essay in this category is well done enough to lift the essay out of the bottom category. Usually, the problems in these essays so interfere with communication that it is difficult to understand exactly what the writer is trying to say.

ESSAY IV

I believe that if a person has an idea about something, but popular opinion disagrees with them, that person will usally change their mind.

Popular opinion is known as the moral way of believing. This is evidenced in peer pressure. Situations where a kid may like or dislike someone, will change if many of the other students disagree with him. The kid doesn't want to appear different from anybody else. He may alienate himself to many other students and he wouldn't like that at all. People don't like to be different because that gives them a radical view, and this would be giving themselves a bad impression.

The language in Essay IV is not exact and the ideas are not clearly presented. Although almost every sentence is syntactically correct, the ideas contained are difficult to understand. The first sentence of the second paragraph, for example, is not explained, and the last sentence is meaningless.

SECTION 4. COLLEGE APPLICATION SAMPLE

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS ESSAY

"Because other segments of this application are more formally structured, we have included this form to enable you to tell us more about yourself as a person. For example, you may want to share with the Admission Office something about the experiences that have shaped your personal development, or you may want to discuss your goals, values or ideals. We seek a response that will help us to know you better."

In my English class last year, I read selections from the works of Henry David Thoreau, and my interest in what I saw led me to read more of Walden and "Civil Disobedience." I have also read works of Eknath Easwaran, an Eastern philosopher whose theories resemble those of Thoreau. Both writers stress the importance of the individual: Thoreau describes an ability to "transcend" surroundings or society, and Eknath Easwaran believes that each individual is a crucial part of a whole, the whole of humanity. A third reading interest I have is in the theories and works of such existentialists as Sartre, Camus and Frankl; they, too, are concerned with the individual and his or her part in society or humanity.

I was first fascinated with these and other philosophers because of their ideas, particularly their thoughts about individuals' roles. I do not agree personally with some of the ideas—for example, I favor the humanistic approach to life existentialism includes, but disagree with various basic existentialist beliefs. (The works of various philosophers not only explain their ideas but show how they developed what they believe.) None of the works I have mentioned is based completely on religion—these writers observed the world around them and wrote the truth as they saw it. Thoreau, for example, made choices about living his life based largely upon his observations of nature. Eknath Easwaran's works are based less upon nature observation than upon study of common philosophical threads in world religions and of the spiritual life.

I am fascinated with the ideas—I am an individual learning about my relation to society and humanity. My interest in the development of philosophical theories is also quite personal because I am developing a philosophy. The readings are one

place where I am exposed to existing theories, and I can see similarities between my experiences observing and those of the philosophers. Thoreau observed natural life around Walden Pond and made a decision to "live deliberately"; in a similar way, I observed the mutual acceptance among the second graders in the First Communion class I teach and I resolved to try to eliminate exclusiveness around me in my school. I feel that each person has a responsibility to develop talents and to help others in whatever way he or she can. Because I believe in this responsibility and because my reading provokes thought on means of developing standards for my life, I will continue to develop my own philosophy.

In some literature I have read, authors draw upon tangible experiences to explain philosophical theories. A common thread in the works of such authors as Henry David Thoreau, Viktor Frankl and Eknath Easwaran is the direct connection between the writers' observations of daily life and their philosophical theories. I find this technique intriguing and at times useful in my own life.

In "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For," the second chapter of Walden, Thoreau describes a morning: "I was as much affected by the faint hum of a mosquito making its invisible and unimaginable tour through my apartment at earliest dawn . . . as I could be by any trumpet that ever sang of fame." He later states, "Morning is when I am awake and then is dawn in me. Moral reform is the effort to throw off sleep." Thoreau makes a direct connection between the concrete morning, where he was aware of something as small as a mosquito, to a mental or spiritual state which allows a person to truly be alive. His observation of morning, of the dawn, led him to decide that "We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids but by an infinite expectation of the dawn, which does not forsake us in our soundest sleep." Thoreau chose a part of his way of life, a part of his personal philosophy, based on an experience in the early morning.

Thoreau's belief in a constant internal "expectation of the dawn" is similar to Viktor Frankl's theory that an individual must be constantly aware of a meaning or purpose to his or her life and this awareness makes life bearable. Frankl was a prisoner at Auschwitz among other death camps, and his experience led to his development of logotherapy, a school of psychiatry. In Man's Search for Meaning, Frankl describes one point in his stay at a death camp when he was near total and utter despair. "Almost in tears with pain," he began to imagine himself giving a lecture on his experiences. "All that oppressed me . . . became objective . . . . By this method I succeeded in somehow rising above the situation . . . . Emotion, which is suffering, ceases to be suffering as soon as we form a clear and

precise picture of it." Frankl directly traces his experience to the development of psychological thought based on a person's need for meaning.

Eknath Easwaran is an Indian philosopher who has written, among other works, Meditation, a guide book, and The End of Sorrow, volume one of a translation of the Bhagavad Gita. Both books include descriptions of his beliefs' relevance to daily life. In Meditation, for example, he describes his dog wandering time and time again off the path where he and his wife were walking. He called the dog back each time, and he considers the "calling back" of attention and focusing of thoughts to be one thing people must do to achieve the highest spiritual goals. He regards life's "supreme goal" as "the discovery of the unity of all life." Those who have attained it can inspire others: "When they write a commentary on the scriptures, it is in the light of their own experience and enables us to practice their teachings in our daily life." Easwaran sees unity and draws the basis for his philosophy from all life and in turn bases his own daily life upon what he believes. Easwaran's observations of daily life are somewhat different from Thoreau's or Frankl's because his philosophy is reflected in all actions and in everything he sees around him. The connection between his experience or observation and his beliefs is so strong that he lives his philosophy and sees it in all life.

I have, at times during my life, drawn principles from observation. I teach a second grade First Communion class, and I have seen their often unconditional acceptance of each other. During one of the first classes of the year, a child offered to share drawing space in her book with someone she did not know who had forgotten her book. I resolved to try to eliminate exclusiveness in my own school by doing as much as I can to make sure that everyone is included in a conversation or that no one hits alone at field hockey practice. Elimination of exclusiveness could be considered a small part of a basic belief I hold which includes placement of value on equality and awareness of others' feelings. Reading such authors as Thoreau, Frankl, and Easwaran indicates to me that observation of and thought about ordinary events can lead to a clear development of philosophy in my own life.

SECTION 5. SHARING ACTIVITIES

The suggestions that follow are not presented as activities but rather as general approaches to working through this stage of the "Instructional Composing Process." Sharing is important not only to the writing process, but also to the individual. Although focus is on the work, the activity can promote productive communication and discussion among students about ideas and feelings beyond the specific work.

1. Begin with having students read their own compositions aloud to partners (one-on-one) without critical comment. This enables writers to verbalize and hear their own works, an important part of writing that many students bypass in the rush to complete the assignment. Often, students recognize stylistic and mechanical errors just by reading their works aloud. This is more effective than having someone else point them out.

2. After students have become accustomed to reading their works aloud, use the sharing phase to have partners read the writer's work aloud to the writer. We learn a great deal about our writing efforts when we hear someone else struggle with them.

3. Use directed sharing activities focusing on specific composition elements. Not only does this reinforce the skill and/or content under consideration for that particular assignment, but it also provides a starting point for discussion.

4. The sharing activity should *not* be evaluative. Students describe what they understand from the work and, later, how they react to it, rather than grading or evaluating each other's compositions. By describing what they understand (for example, listing the main ideas of the paragraphs) or what they find (for example, listing three transitions the writer used), the reader may convey the effectiveness of the communication. If the main ideas are different from those the writer meant to convey, a problem in communication exists. If the reader cannot list any transitions, perhaps the writer did not include any.

5. The sharing activity should begin with pairs and move gradually to larger sharing groups as students become more confident in the process. Avoid embarrassing students by having them read their works to large groups, including the class, before all are sufficiently prepared and comfortable.

6. Ultimately, after confidence and trust have been established, students might participate in "writers' workshop" activities in which small groups share their works freely and critically with each other. To participate effectively in this kind of activity, the writers must have confidence in themselves and in the group. "Good" writers may reach this stage soon, but most require time and practice before they feel comfortable with group reactions. Some students may not reach this level and should not be forced into it.

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